残疾战神
嫁我为妾后
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Information

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Historical Records has it that Huo Wujiu, the War God of Great Liang, was captured by the enemy, had his meridians damaged, his legs crippled, and was imprisoned. In order to humiliate him further, the fatuous and self-indulgent ruler even gifted him to his homosexual royal brother as his concubine.

General Huo suffered all kinds of humiliation, nursed his vengeance for three years, and then escaped back to Great Liang using his cunningness.

After curing his leg, he led his army for three months and invaded enemy lands, killing its ruler and burning its capital. Finally, he beheaded that good-for-nothing homosexual and hung his head on the city wall for three full years.

Since then, the world has been unified.

—

A university history department instructor, Jiang Suizhou, received a graduation thesis that was written based on Huo Wujiu's unofficial records, and criticized the student.

When he opened his eyes again, he was dressed as the homosexual prince in the unofficial records.

There were lanterns and decorations hung up everywhere, and his servants reported that the disabled General of the enemy had been carried into the King's Palace in a bridal sedan chair.

Faced with General Huo, who was tortured to death, wearing a bright red wedding dress and with a gloomy gaze, Jiang Suizhou realized that the unofficial records had come true.

He would also be condemned in public, and his head would be hung on the city wall for three years.

Without a better option, Jiang Suizhou had to put General Huo in good hands.

In the middle of the court, be it an open attack or a stab in the back, or all sorts of humiliation from that fatuous King, he gritted his teeth to defend General Huo in hopes that he could keep his head after three years.

He did not dare to let this nine-foot-long “Concubine” serve him.

But before the three years were up, General Huo’s leg healed on its own.

Not only did he kill the fatuous king and unify the world, but he also forcibly trapped him in his room and insisted on performing his duty as a “Concubine.”

—

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

As night fell, the stars in the Milky Way wandered about.

The King’s Mansion in the middle of Qinghe Square was decorated with red silk and lanterns early in the morning. Once the sky darkened, the lights were immediately lit, and from afar, they projected a bright golden red. The busy servants went in and out of the threshold and the thick layer of firecracker debris in front of the steps were all illustrative of a festive atmosphere.

When the soft breeze of early spring coming from the south of the Yangtze River blew, the red candles in the lanterns flickered, shaking the auspicious characters on the lanterns.

There was a joyful event taking place at the King’s mansion today. The third day of February was an auspicious day appointed by His Majesty.

His Majesty said that on February 3rd, everything was suitable, especially marriage.

As for whether this day was indeed an auspicious day, it didn’t matter. The most important thing was that the emperor must let the King marry on this day. Even if a funeral was underway at the King’s mansion today, they must put the coffin on hold and first finish marrying the person into the household.

A word from the emperor was as powerful as tens of thousands of pounds.

Even if this emperor, who was assailed by a rebel army two years ago in Yecheng, the capital of the country, fled like a drowning dog with officials

of all ranks all the way south in distress and dragged out an ignoble existence in Yuhuang.

Despite this, the emperor was still the emperor, even if he resembled a stray dog. What was more, this emperor won a huge victory just a few days ago. He was now riding on the crest of success, like a cat that swallowed the canary.

After all, who in this world did not know that His Majesty caught the invincible and fearsome General Huo of Northern Liang and broke both his legs?

It was indeed a great joy.

There was grand jubilation in Jing, as in the King's mansion. This double happiness spread to the King's mansion, but the people in the mansion couldn't cheer. Instead, each of them were grief-stricken as if bereaved of parents.

After all…

Captured generals were commonly killed or mutilated.

However, a general dressed in a wedding dress to be married into their King's mansion as a concubine….This, what the hell was this!?

Therefore, although the King's mansion was beating drums and blowing trumpets today, gay with lanterns and festoons, and had been lighting off firecrackers for most of the day, none of the faces in the King's mansion bore a trace of a smile.

Everyone bustled about and watched the excitement, but each tacitly bowed servilely and dared not speak.

This kind of silence permeated amidst the joyful atmosphere, making the atmosphere in the King's mansion a little depressing. The further you went in, the drearier the atmosphere became.

Especially in Anyin Hall.

Anyin Hall was where His Highness lived, and the word “Anyin” was the name that the great master in the palace gave him from the Lotus Sutra.

This wasn’t unusual. After all, His Highness was born sick and weak from the womb, and his body had never been very healthy. The fact that he had lived to this day in such a sickly manner was thought to be because he had borrowed some of the Buddha’s light.

At present, the silence in Anyin Hall was ablaze with lights.

The entirety of the King’s mansion was hung with red silk, but there was no red silk in Anyin Hall. Under the curtain of the night, the courtyard was filled with candlelights with a warm breeze blowing. Several tall, century-old birchleaf pear trees scattered white fallen flowers in the wind to the ground.

The maids in the courtyard shuttled in and out, acting invisible with bated breath.

Everyone knew that His Highness was in a foul mood today. His Highness has always been reticent and rarely smiled. He always looked gloomy and utterly unfathomable. They couldn’t guess what was on his mind.

And even more so today.

All things considered, although His Highness was homosexual, he was also a man who feared no one. When has there ever been a crippled general of an enemy country bestowed to a King as a concubine?

Regardless of how dangerous the man was, he was akin to a trapped beast. The Emperor’s decree alone was beyond absurd. It was like writing humiliating words into an imperial decree and slapping the King in the face.

Hence, it was only natural that His Highness was in a terrible mood. They, the servants, only had to serve cautiously, lest they’d court bad luck and end up losing their heads at this moment.

The room was quiet.

Because His Highness married a concubine, he did not have to welcome her personally, but the nuptial chamber was necessary.

Therefore, His Highness cleaned up early in the morning, changed into a gold and red wedding robe, and bound his jet-black hair with his jade crown.

He was sitting on the couch, holding a book in one hand.

People stood by his side silently, and no one dared to disturb him.

A young maid who was waiting in the courtyard entered cautiously. She had been ordered by the chief concierge to come in and take away the basin of water by the dressing table.

She kept her head down with her hands clasped in front of her, not daring to let her eyes roam around. The atmosphere in the courtyard was already suffocating enough, but she didn't expect the King's room to be even worse.

The incense was quietly burning in the furnace; the furnishings were simple and solemn; and the lamps were as bright as daylight. It should be an elegant and tranquil place, but it was like the netherworld surrounded by demons, making her legs tremble in fear.

She tried hard not to make a sound while giving a silent salute to the King on the couch, and then flew to carry the copper basin on the floor.

But because she didn't always get to serve inside the house, she was not very skilled. When she got up with the basin, the rim of the basin accidentally hit the edge of the ebony table, made a muffled sound, and splashed some water out.

The thud broke the dead-like calm.

The young maid's hand shook; her body tensed up, and she hastily raised her eyes to look at her master on the couch.

She saw King raising his eyes, and his gaze fell on her quietly.

How beautiful those eyes were. The shape was long and narrow, and the tips of his eyes lazily tilted upward. Combined with his long eyelashes and a slightly raised long eyebrows, he appeared languid and enchanting, the embodiment of the androgynous devil in books who could suck souls.

There was a small scarlet mole adorning the tip of his beautiful eye. In the flickering of the lights, it was almost as if one's soul would be taken away.

However, the young maid felt chilled to the bone.

His eyes were so dark, they were bottomless. Beneath the beauty, they were haughty and ice-cold, as if looking at a dead soul.

Her legs went weak, and she fell to her knees. The copper basin also crashed to the ground with a bang, splashing water all over the floor.

—

Jiang Suizhou stiffly waved his hand, motioning for the young maid to retreat.

As if she had received an amnesty, she incessantly kowtowed to him and apologized for her offense. She then picked up the wet copper basin on the floor and stumbled as she fled away.

Jiang Suizhou looked after her fleeing helter-skelter and felt somewhat confused deep inside.

…Who am I? Am I so scary?

However, he dared not ask this aloud. Naturally, no one could explain it.

He remembered that he had just finished replying to the student's message and turned off the computer in preparation for sleep. For him, it was just an extremely ordinary day – except for the paper he received today, which was just a little too amateurish.

After all, he had been a lecturer at J University for several years, and also taught graduates. He had seen all sorts of odd papers, so he believed he had

a wide range of experience. When he was dealing with students, he could always keep calm and be good humored, answer them with ease, and maintain a benign countenance.

…But it was the first time he saw a history student, based on unofficial records, writing his thesis like a commentary on the ups and downs, singing it with a beautiful voice and rich emotions.

He wrote that Huo Wujiu, the founding General of the Liang Dynasty and the Marquis of Dingbei, had an unspeakable secret in leading the army to destroy Jing. The whys and wherefores of this was that when he was held captive in South Jing, he was once taken as a concubine by a sickly King whose name was untraceable and whose title was “Jing” in South Jing. He endured three years of humiliation, Therefore, when he returned to Northern Liang, he raised an army to swiftly destroy Jing. It was also because of this that he harbored a grudge.

As a result, the King of Jing, who died prematurely due to illness in the few entries in the official history, also died an unnatural death.

He did not die of illness, but was beheaded by the Marquis of Dingbei. To avenge those years, the Marquis of Dingbei even hung his head on the walls of Lin’an and left it hanging there for three whole years.

Jiang Suizhou felt at that time that the kid probably chose the wrong profession. He should have been a screenwriter.

For history majors, it was basically the same as using My Fair Kings to study the history of the Qing Dynasty.

Hence, Jiang Suizhou criticized the paper mercilessly, and finally gave his own suggestions for revision: change the topic and rewrite the thesis.

That student was also quite stubborn.

“How do you know that an unofficial history is false? You can’t say that my paper is a fabrication just because of this! Even if you have studied a lot of

historical materials, you have not personally experienced and seen it with your own eyes!”

After receiving this reply, Jiang Suizhou sneered.

I study history, so do I have a need to experience it myself? If I were to study paleontology, then would I still have to go into the mountains and become a monkey?

He coldly pushed his glasses up and replied, “Fair enough, but the paper, rewrite it.”

After sending the reply, he rubbed his sore shoulder and neck with a smile and turned off the computer.

And at that very moment, the surroundings went abruptly black.

…Power outage?

But it was dark all around. There wasn’t even a faint light that would normally come through at night.

Jiang Suizhou froze and tried to reach out to find the power source on the table.

But before he could stretch out his hand, the surroundings suddenly lit up.

There was a lamp, but it was jumping and flickering.

Lamps illuminated the area around him.

He found himself sitting in a room, under a warm yellow light. The surrounding furnishings were all ancient, with screens, partitioned treasure display shelves; a place of charm and beauty, noble and dignified. Although there were no bright colors around, and it looked ancient, the shine reflected by those objects was of a reserved and solemn luxury.

The house was extremely spacious. There were a lot of maids standing around, seven or eight of them at a glance, and each was standing with their

eyes downcast. It was not crowded at all.

Jiang Suizhou was a bit confused.

…Illusion?

He lowered his eyes.

At this time, he was actually wearing a bright red robe with wide sleeves. The silk draped on him felt luxurious to the touch, and the gold silk embroidery with intricate cloud patterns glittered under the lamp.

Based on this, Jiang Suizhou concluded it was late Jing and early Liang.

The book in his hand was printed from right to left in vertical rows, in traditional Song characters. Looking at the ink traces, they were still in the stage of engraving and printing.

The low table beside him was Chinese rosewood, and he had seen the tea cup on the table in the museum.

[Sweet white glaze cup with camellia pattern from the tomb of the King and Marquis at the end of Jing.]

Jiang Suizhou’s gaze was vacant.

…Who am I? Where am I? How did something dug up from the ancient tombs end up on my desk?

It was also at this time that the reckless maid bumped and produced a thin sound, drawing his attention to her.

But as soon as he glanced over and before he could think about what to say, the girl about ten years old fell on her knees in fright. She spilled water all over the floor and kept kowtowing.

On the contrary, Jiang Suizhou was dumbfounded.

He tried to remain calm and raised his hand, signaling her to retreat.

He watched the little girl gratefully clutch the basin and run away. After running only a few steps, she nearly slipped by the water underfoot, and ran right into the man coming in.

“How dare you! Get out, now!” the man scolded.

A eunuch’s voice.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes to look at him, and saw this man trotting all the way over, with a clean face and a smile on his face.

His smile was quite sincere, with a trifle of ingratiation.

“Master.” He skillfully saluted in front of Jiang Suizhou, approached his side, and bowed down to whisper in his ear.

“That bridal sedan chair has arrived, Master. Don’t let the auspicious hour slip by.”

Jiang Suizhou looked at him quietly, and the hand hidden in his sleeve pinched himself severely.

He did not believe that he suddenly crossed over in time.

Also, without fully understanding who he was and his circumstances, he was about to have…

A wedding night.

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Chapter 2

Chapter 2

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The pain from the palm of his hand shot through his central nervous system, and he was in such pain that his spirits cleared, but the picture in front of him did not change at all.

Due to the pain, his eyes even turned chilly for a moment, making the eunuch in front of him shiver in fright.

…He did seem to have somehow become a man from ancient times.

This man should be a royalty in the last years of the Jing Dynasty. As for the rest…he didn't know anything.

Oh, he knew one more thing.

This person was marrying a concubine today. But because he had now become *him*, the concubine, too, had become his.

That was all the information he got. The eunuch in front of him was still all smiles while standing here with a bow, waiting for him to go into the nuptial chamber.

Jiang Suizhou's head was on the verge of exploding.

…What was this all about?!

He was frantic deep inside, but none of it showed on his face.

The eunuch seemed a little anxious, and his smile turned somewhat bitter. He lowered his voice, and his tone grew painstakingly persuasive.

“Master, this servant knows you’re unwilling, but it is the Emperor’s decree after all…” He advised, “Even if you don’t like it, just go through the motions! That person…I heard that his martial arts have been abolished earlier on, and he is now a cripple. It’s very safe, so you don’t have to worry.”

…Someone’s martial arts was abolished, and he became crippled?

Jian Suizhou’s eyes showed bafflement.

Was this a game of power play?

He alone knew that at the end of the Jing dynasty, the dynasty was rotten, and the emperor was muddleheaded. In particular, Emperor Jingyou, the last emperor of Jing, was notoriously absurd and fatuous, a self-indulgent ruler. History recorded that he was obsessed with beauty and treated imperial affairs as child’s play. He was especially partial to his relatives and allowed his uncle Pang Shao to run amok.

However, the Jing Dynasty had only a few heirs. By the time Emperor Jingyou came into power, most of the royal children of the same generation had died prematurely, leaving only Jingwang, an invalid who died in the prime of his youth.

Because of this, the Jing Dynasty fled south for a few years before it was wiped out by the rising Liang Dynasty.

But now…it seemed that he was also a part of this chaotic and despotic court.

Jiang Suizhou had a bitter taste in his mouth.

What evil deed did he commit that made him go from being a corporate with a comfortable life to being a noble aristocrat of a doomed dynasty?

Was it because he had just scolded his student a little too hard?

How was that possible?

Just then, there was a call from outside.

“Qianshan-*gongong*[1], the bridal palanquin has already been carried into Yincui Pavilion,” informed a maid.

The eunuch gritted his teeth and raised his voice, “What’s the hurry!”

The maid immediately shut her mouth.

The eunuch turned his head and looked earnestly at Jiang Suizhou again, his eyes full of pleading.

Jiang Suizhou knew that in this situation, he was bound to face the nuptial chamber, and he’d die either way. But since the lady married him against her wishes and was also disabled, he thought he could easily muddle through today’s wedding night.

As for the rest…

Wait until he survived today first, and then he could slowly figure out his identity and situation before making plans.

He mumbled a faint hum and stood up.

The eunuch’s eyes lit up, and he quickly reached out to help him.

Jiang Suizhou was unaccustomed to being served. He didn’t know if it was an illusion, but when he stood up, he felt weak, tired, and a little dizzy.

He could only let the eunuch support him.

He stepped off the platform. Next to him was a floor-to-ceiling western mirror. Jiang Suizhou glanced at it sideways and saw his reflection in the mirror.

…He actually looked exactly the same as himself, but looked two or three years younger. He appeared to be about twenty-four or twenty-five.

His students had previously complimented him on his good looks and said he looked like a villain. Jiang Suizhou originally denied it, but looking at the person in the mirror now, Jiang Suizhou agreed…

He didn’t look like a good person.

He was already beautifully cold and appeared extremely heartless to begin with. Along with his long hair and wide sleeves, he looked even more exquisite and far removed from the masses. His eyes, in particular, were inherently cold. A faint glance at people could freeze their hearts.

Jiang Suizhou retracted his gaze, and out of the corner of his eye, he found a small vermillion dot adorning the tip of his upper left eyelid.

This mole was something he didn’t have originally.

However, before he could take a closer look, the eunuch led him past the mirror and towards the door.

Someone was waiting outside with a thin cloak ready in his hand. Seeing Jiang Suizhou approaching, that person skillfully wrapped the cloak around him.

Jiang Suizhou was puzzled and frowned.

He was already dressed thicker than the people around him, so why did he wrap him in another layer?

The eunuch next to him keenly sensed his expression and immediately clarified kindly, “It’s windy at night. Your Highness can’t bear it, so it’s better to wear one more.”

…Your Highness?

Before Jiang Suizhou came back to his senses, he was led down the steps and onto the palanquin stationed in front of the room.

Once out of the room, he felt it. The wind was supposed to be warm, but it felt cold when it blew on him. This was different from being sick. It was more like being congenitally deficient and having a low immunity.

Combined with the eunuch's "Highness" address just now, Jiang Suizhou's heart felt anything but reassured.

At the end of the Jing Dynasty, there was only one invalid who was called "Highness."

It was His Royal Highness Jingwang, whose name had been erased from the history books. He was said to be congenitally deficient, and he died early due to illness.

When the palanquin was lifted, Jiang Suizhou felt a little dizzy.

In accordance with the course of history, he would live for three to five more years at most and die of illness.

Even if he didn't die of illness, the Northern Liang would exterminate Great Jing, and he would not be kept as a remnant of the previous dynasty.

Jiang Suizhou's gaze was empty. He slowly leaned back in his chair.

Anyone who suddenly realized that he only had a few years to live wouldn't be ecstatic.

After calming down, he turned his head, looked at the eunuch beside the palanquin, and decided to confirm with him again.

What did he call him just now?

"Qianshan," he called.

But to his surprise, upon hearing his call, the eunuch beside him raised his head in disbelief and looked at him blankly.

Jiang Suizhou's heart thumped.

From his reaction, he knew that he must have called him wrong.

In ancient times, those who served nobles were always sensitive and sharp-minded. Having committed such a huge gaffe the moment he came, he was afraid…

However, before he could finish his worries, a flattered look surfaced on the eunuch's face, to the point where he was at a loss what to do.

"Your Highness, please give your command!" His eyes glowed, like a dog wagging its tail and spreading its joy. "You-you should still call this servant, Meng Qianshan…"

Jiang Suizhou: "…"

All right, he was overthinking. This personal attendant of Jingwang's didn't seem to be too bright.

He averted his eyes, hummed, and asked with an air of calmness, "How long has it been since she was carried to Jingwang's residence?"

Meng Qianshan didn't hear any of the probing in his words. He just thought that the Prince was worried about delaying the auspicious time, and told him honestly, "Your Highness, don't worry. Madam Huo has just arrived. You will arrive just in time."

He didn't refute the phrase "Jingwang's residence," so Jiang Suizhou was sure.

He has indeed become the short-lived ghost who wasn't penned much in the history books.

Wait…

He frowned.

Madam Huo?

This new concubine was surnamed Huo?

Although he knew that unofficial history was nothing but nonsense, he couldn’t help but think of what was on that student’s paper.

He was crippled and was married into King Jing’s mansion, plus his surname was Huo…

This new concubine—why did she sound so much like the General Huo of the history books?

However, Jiang Suizhou immediately shook away this thought.

What was he thinking? Even TV dramas wouldn’t dare to play the plot of that unofficial history like this. It was a fabricated vulgar gibberish to please the public at a glance. It must not be true.

—

Jiang Suizhou confirmed the theory in his mind, and shut his mouth. But Meng Qianshan, who was next to him, chattered on and on with him the whole way.

Jiang Suizhou gradually realized that this servant, who had little brains, must have been usually left out in the cold. Today, he mistakenly treated him graciously, and he began to revel in it.

It was good that he was silly.

Listening to him rambling, Jiang Suizhou’s originally heavy heart eased a little, and between the lines, he grasped a general idea of the situation in the mansion.

Since I’m already here, I should take one step and look around before taking another, he sighed inwardly.

The palanquin trip lasted for about a quarter of an hour before stopping in front of a courtyard.

A red lantern was hung at the entrance of the courtyard, and under the light, there was firecracker debris all over the place.

Through the courtyard door, a palanquin could be seen parked in front of the main house. Many servants were waiting in front of the gate, and when they saw Jiang Suizhou coming, they knelt and bowed.

Jiang Suizhou was not quite used to the sight of people worshipping him, so he raised his hand and let them all rise.

An old granny who looked to be the matchmaker[2] stepped forward in welcome and smilingly said to Jiang Suizhou, “Congratulations, Your Highness. The lady is already waiting in the room, just waiting for you to lift her veil.”

Jiang Suizhou responded.

He knew the customs of Jing Dynasty. The ceremony of taking a concubine was much simpler than taking a wife. The moment the bridal sedan chair was carried into the house through the side door, the husband would lift her veil and drink the nuptial wine, and then it was done.

He nodded and walked past the crowd to the main house.

His pace was smooth and slow, and his clothes fluttered as he walked. He gave off a cold and calm atmosphere with quite a superior bearing.

Only Jiang Suizhou knew how panicked he was at this moment.

After all, he transmigrated into the Jing dynasty in a daze, becoming an invalid who would die soon. At present, he also had to go to the nuptial chamber and face the poor lady who was forced to marry Jingwang.

She was pitiful, but he was not much better.

With this in mind, he climbed up the steps at a seemingly smooth but heavy pace and pushed the door open.

Inside the door, the red canopy fluttered, and the wedding candles flickered. The maids on either side smiled radiantly and bowed to him as they chorused their congratulations.

Someone guided him into the inner room.

In the midst of a charming scene, he saw the man sitting upright in the chamber.

He was dressed in layers upon layers of red, his head topped with a veil embroidered with a phoenix and affixed with an ornament. He was sitting upright in a wheelchair, with his shoulders straight, like an unbreakable spear.

Yes, a spear.

This man was tall, had broad shoulders, and a pair of long legs that hardly fit in the wheelchair. He was, unmistakably, a man!

A man. A disabled man. A man who married Jingwang.

…This "Madam Huo" that I married, don't tell me he's Huo Wujiu!

Jiang Suizhou stopped in his tracks.

His gaze fell on the hands that the person placed on his knees.

The bones of his fingers were distinct, with bulging veins on the back of his hands. Although they were only quietly resting on his knee, they exuded a murderous aura, as if they could snap a person's neck at any time.

For some reason, Jiang Suizhou recalled a fragment from his student's paper.

"…After Huo Wujiu, Marquis of Dingbei, was captured, the Hou Zhu of Southern Jing damaged his meridians, maimed his legs, and married him to

Jingwang, who was known for his identity as a cutsleeve, to humiliate him. He endured humiliation in Jingwang's residence for three years and then managed to escape back to Northern Liang to heal his legs.

After that, in order to avenge those days, he personally beheaded Jingwang after he wiped out the Jing Dynasty and hung his head on the city gates for three years.

It was for this reason that Jingwang was not mentioned in historical records. Even his name was erased."

Jiang Suizhou's hands shook a little.

If he was Huo Wujiu…if he was indeed Huo Wujiu….

Then three years later, the one who Huo Wujiu would behead wouldn't be that Jingwang, but him, Jiang Suizhou.

He stared at the man in the wedding dress in front of him, trying to find any trace from him to prove that he was not a man.

But, nothing.

Jiang Suizhou's mind went blank.

"Your Highness? Your Highness!"

Meng Qianshan, who was following, saw him stop in place with a cold expression. He couldn't tell what he was thinking, so he quickly whispered to nudge him.

Jiang Suizhou turned his head sideways.

He saw Meng Qianshan standing beside him, carefully whispering, "It's time to lift the veil."

Right, lift the veil.

Before seeing the face, who could guarantee that he was Huo Wujiu?

Jiang Suizhou walked forward, comforting himself inwardly while forcing himself to calmly stretch out his hand and uncover the flimsy veil.

The red candles flickered.

In the midst of the gorgeous red, he met a pair of intense black and ruthlessly cold eyes.

Footnotes:

1. The form of address for eunuchs in ancient China

2. In the past, old grannies were in charge of the wedding ceremony.

T/N: Please note that this will be a MTL of the novel, so there will be some mistranslations. However, we will do our best translating and editing the novel. If you find any mistakes, please comment below. ^^ Happy reading ~

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Chapter 3

Jiang Suizhou stepped back involuntarily as the red veil floated down to the ground.

He felt his heart beating rapidly with shock, and even the blood in his ears surged in the wake of it.

…Just a mere glance.

His eyebrows are sharply shaped and low set, so his eyes appear especially cold and hostile, with a splash of undisguised bloodthirstiness and ruthlessness.

In the midst of his panic, Jiang Suizhou seemed to be looking at a dying beast. Although he was prostrate in front of him, he could pounce on him at any time, bite his throat and die with him.

A bloody smell mixed with the sweet fragrance of the red candles wafted in the air, a little bit like the putrid and cold smell of a cell.

Now, he knew who this person was without asking.

…Wasn’t he the famous God of War of Great Liang, who was crippled by the Hou Zhu of Southern Jing, who would chop his head off and hang it out to dry on the city walls three years later?

Jiang Suizhou pursed his lips and suddenly wanted to apologize to that student of his.

Let him go, please. He wanted to leave.

Jiang Suizhou stalled in place, while Meng Qianshan who was beside him was about to go crazy with trepidation.

What was His Highness doing?! He lifted the veil, but threw it away. At this point, Jiang Suizhou did not utter a single word and stared at Huo Wujiu coldly.

Meng Qianshan cautiously glanced at Huo Wujiu.

He once only heard that the only son of Marquis Dingbei was a young hero rarely seen in the world. Right now, it seemed that the rumors were true. The emperor caught him back and locked him in the imperial dungeon. Those who were locked in there usually did not survive more than three days before being tortured to death.

Yet this Madam Huo survived inside for more than a month.

His lips were abnormally white, and bruises adorned the corners of his lips, along with some dried bloodstains. Not to mention, he was indeed good-looking. He had deep set facial features, exuding aggressiveness. He was the image of a strategic general. Even with injuries, he didn't look pitiful, but rather conveyed a sense of decadence and fragility.

A visible scar peeked out from a dip in the neckline of the wedding robe. Its muted shade of dark red wasn't easily discernible against the crimson robes he was wearing.

He decided to take the risk to conclude the ceremony.

With this in mind, Meng Qianshan carefully bowed in respect and brought Jiang Suizhou the nuptial wine.

"Your Highness." He bowed beside Jiang Suizhou.

When Jiang Suizhou glanced sideways, he saw that the tray held in Meng Qianshan's hand had two golden cups with wine in it.

He did need to get over his shock.

So, he picked up one of the cups, tilted his head, and drank the wine in the cup clean.

Meng Qianshan's eyes almost popped out.

…*Your Highness! That's the nuptial wine, the nuptial wine!*

Meng Qianshan looked at Jiang Suizhou and then at Huo Wujiu in panic.

One looked as indifferent as a statue, and the other was cold and arrogant as Yanwang. They stuffed the words that were pouring out of his mouth back into his throat.

At that moment, he saw his master turn around and put the golden cup back into the tray.

"Withdraw," he ordered.

Meng Qianshan froze. "Uh, Master…"

He saw his master glance at him lightly, and the flickering candle light illuminated the small mole at the corner of his eye.

"All of you, withdraw."

——

After the cup of wine was downed, Jiang Suizhou finally calmed down.

By now, he was all but certain that he had become that unfortunate Jingwang who had married Huo Wujiu in the unofficial historical records described in that student's paper.

After he was sure of this fact, he calmed down a bit.

All in all, this person he suddenly became would die early no matter what. Being killed by Huo Wujiu, on the contrary, was a good thing for him.

After all, an illness was uncontrollable, but relationships between people could be mended.

Huo Wujiu was also regarded as an illustrious figure in history. He defeated the world, but his uncle went to sit on the throne. After his uncle died, it was also his uncle's son who inherited the throne. On the other hand, Huo Wujiu led his troops back to Yangguan alone and remained there for life.

He believed that if he didn't humiliate such a righteous man and respected him a bit, Huo Wujiu definitely wouldn't kill him three years later.

It was just…

He looked at Huo Wujiu.

His identity at present was that of Southern Jing's prince, and the Huo Wujiu in front of him was an enemy, a traitor.

If he stepped forward and deliberately expressed goodwill, it would certainly attract suspicion, which would be counterproductive.

So…

Jiang Suizhou slowly took a breath and spoke coldly.

"You reek of blood; it's disgusting," he said with a sneer.

Although his childhood wasn't happy, his upbringing was quite strict, so he grew up courteous and polite. He had never uttered such words to anyone.

Thus, he sounded strangely awkward and lacking in confidence.

Fortunately, his voice was cold and carried a dab of condescending arrogance, so he barely covered it up and bluffed his way through.

Huo Wujiu didn't take up the thread of the conversation.

He looked down and faintly glanced at the red veil that fell to the ground.

He was exceedingly indifferent, with an innate pride. He was obviously at anyone's disposal, but he was so awe-inspiring that he deterred anyone from taking a single step forward.

Jiang Suizhou pulled himself together and then said, "They sent you to benwang right after dragging you out of prison? Does my Emperor brother really think that benwang has no preferences and can swallow anything in my mouth?"

He tried his best to be harsh but after these cutting words left his mouth, he felt a shiver down his spine from the unease.

Huo Wujiu's gaze moved away from the red veil on the ground and swept lightly over Jiang Suizhou.

He saw the man standing in the light, his back straight, his gaze sullen and cold. His pair of fox eyes with upturned tails were brimming under the red candles, and his red attire set off the small red mole at the tip of his eye, making him even more enchanting.

His tone was quite fierce, awkwardly fierce, even with a dash of regret and shame, as if he had never been mean before.

He has fought with Southern Jing many times, so naturally he has also heard of His Highness Jingwang's name.

He was an invalid, born from a concubine who devastated the country. He was filled with evil tricks and was in no way a person of good character.

Jingwang had a long-standing reputation for being a sinister and vicious man. As early as when he was twelve or thirteen years old and still a young prince, there were always corpses being dragged out of his palace, and their cadavers were totally ghastly. Once he was suddenly enlightened as a cutsleeve, a lot of the male pets he gathered in his backyard died for his entertainment, and there weren't many left alive now.

But now it seemed…those were exaggerations.

Meanwhile, Jiang Suizhou was only concentrating on deliberating his words, and did not notice Huo Wujiu's fleeting gaze.

He paused and then said, "I'll find a physician to examine you tomorrow. If you're going to die, do not die in my place." After saying that, he turned around and added, "Thereafter, stay here honestly and give benwang less trouble."

After speaking, Jiang Suizhou secretly sighed in relief.

…That should have been mean enough, right?

Not only must he retain the ferocity to the enemy and not really hurt him, he must also find excuses to heal his injuries.

It was so difficult.

Naturally, he was thinking of treating Huo Wujiu's injuries tonight.

After all, he had only just come out of prison, and Hou Zhu would never extend him medical treatment. Skin trauma wasn't fatal, but it was unwise to delay treatment. Moreover, Jiang Suizhou, as a modern man who had never seen any bloody scenes, was a bit frightened even by the smell of Huo Wujiu's blood.

But he knew that was out of the question.

As the only prince in the dynasty, he was still not sure what kind of people were in his manor. It was for this reason that he ordered everyone to retreat just now.

It was naturally unreasonable for him to rush to treat the enemy's injuries as soon as he was sent in. But if they have spent the night alone, it would be reasonable enough to request a physician for him tomorrow.

So…

Jiang Suizhou looked around without leaving a trace.

This was a chamber specially used for wedding events. Except for the red lacquered bed with gold edges, there was only a narrow couch left for people to lie on.

There was no other place to sleep.

The couch was delicate and unique, with carved corners and a total width of no more than two handspans. It was more like an ornament than a piece of furniture.

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes showed a sense of resignation.

He knew that he could only spend the night on this couch tonight.

Before lifting his steps, he did not forget to turn around and give Huo Wujiu a cold look.

“Go and lie on the bed. Stay away from me, and don’t taint me with your bloody smell,” he said.

Unbeknownst to him, his condescending and arrogant countenance, coupled with his overly delicate face, made him appear more or less seductive beneath the flickering red candlelights.

After speaking, Jiang Suizhou turned around and went straight to the couch and laid down.

He had to make do with it all night.

He faced the wall and didn’t notice that after he laid down, Huo Wujiu’s gaze fell onto his back.

His cold scrutiny was as icy as a blade buried in the snow and ice of Yangguan.

A moment later, Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze and lowered his eyes. His left hand, which had been resting on his knee, slowly turned over, then he unfurled his palm.

That hand was stained with fresh blood. Under the swaying light of the red candles, he held a wood chip as sharp as a blade in the palm of his head.

It was something he broke off from the inner wall of the palanquin on the way here.

Originally, the wood chip should have been used to slash Jingwang's throat at an opportune moment earlier on.

But…

He glanced faintly at Jiang Suizhou's back.

Just now, at the moment he was about to make a move to kill him, he met those eyes.

Bright, clean, yet totally flustered, as if he was scared of him.

Huo Wujiu closed his eyes.

He had clenched the wooden chip tightly in his palm, but at that moment, he made no move.

He seemed to have never had a penchant for bullying the weak.

After a few moments, he slowly opened his eyes. He placed both hands on the sides of the wheelchair, and with a little force, moved himself from the wheelchair to the bed.

Pain erupted all over his body, causing his muscles to tremble uncontrollably. He was not aware of it at all. With a slight movement of his hand, he hid the bloodstained wood chip under the bed, concealing the sound amidst the rustling of his garments from when he transferred himself to the bed.

His gaze swept over Jiang Suizhou and saw that he was lying uncomfortably. His back was stiff, as if forcing himself to sleep.

…Tch.

Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze smoothly.

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Chapter 4.1

Jiang Suizhou closed his eyes tightly after lying down, just waiting for sleep to come quickly so he could get through the night.

It would be best if he could wake up in his apartment the next day, awoken by his alarm clock.

…However, despite merely yearning for a peaceful sleep, Jiang Suizhou failed to get what he wanted.

It was indeed a couch with carvings all around. Not only was it painful to look at, it was even more painful to lie on. He could only turn on his side with a thin cloak that was barely a quilt draped over him.

This sickly body was so delicate that it was beyond his expectation.

The narrow couch made his back sore, and despite it being springtime, his hands and feet were freezing cold.

He tossed and turned, unable to fall asleep until the red candles burned out in the room and the sky outside the window grew brighter.

By the time he sat up early in the morning, he was so sore that his body felt like it was falling apart. His throat was a little itchy, giving him the urge to cough.

He coughed twice softly in an attempt to suppress the sound and rubbed at his temples dizzily.

Outside the window, there were already many maids waiting on the porch. Jiang Suizhou looked up and saw Meng Qianshan standing in the doorway

with his hand in his sleeves. Presumably, he was waiting for him to wake up before entering to serve him.

He couldn’t let him in. Once he entered, wouldn’t the fact that he and Huo Wujiu were not in bed together be exposed?

Jiang Suizhou immediately came to a decision in his heart.

Gotta run, and run fast.

He glanced at Huo Wujiu.

There was an empty wheelchair on the other side of the bed, and Huo Wujiu was lying motionless on his side, facing him.

The window allowed in some light, shining on his face. His raven feather-like eyelashes cast a shadow over his cheeks.

He was indeed very good looking.

His facial contours were sharp, and his features were deep. His nose was straight, and with his eyes closed, his long lashes hid that pair of ruthless, menacing, black eyes. His heroic spirit seemed to be displayed ostentatiously.

With the help of the sunlight, Jiang Suizhou saw a tiny old scar that abruptly cut off the edge of his left eyebrow.

It was akin to a scratch on a divine weapon, causing it to fall into mortal dust, tainted with drops of blood.

He was sleeping soundly.

Jiang Suizhou breathed a sigh of relief and carefully got up from the couch.

It would be best if Huo Wujiu didn’t wake up yet.

After all, he’d been so harsh last night before hiding to the side to sleep for the night. It was now dawn. For him to run away with his tail between his

legs now was a bit humiliating no matter how one looked at it.

This kind of embarrassing thing was better done without anyone knowing.

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou straightened his robe and stood upright. His posture seemed candid, but in reality, walked out cautiously.

With the sound of footsteps drifting away, the door opened with a sound, and then closed again.

The only subtle sound in the room also disappeared, leaving nothing but an empty silence.

Huo Wujiu opened his eyes.

Those gloomy eyes were awake and sharp and hardly looked like he had just woken up.

His eyes landed coldly on the couch under the window.

Daylight from the open window fell onto it, and dust particles fluttered in the light.

The couch was empty.

What was more, it was carefully tidied up. Just by looking at the folds that were clumsily smoothed out, he could still make out the effort the person took to cover up the traces of his sleep.

Huo Wujiu’s gaze paused.

He has always been highly vigilant and has a keen sense of hearing and vision. Therefore, Jingwang’s every move last night had not escaped his eyes.

Huo Wujiu watched as he squeezed down on the couch and listened to him toss and turn all night long, believing that he was moving noiselessly.

Seconds ago, Huo Wujiu listened to him as he tiptoed outside like a thief.

…It was unbelievable.

Before he came here, Huo Wujiu envisioned what he might face in Jingwang's Manor. Jingwang was a vicious and insidious person, cunning and vindictive; plus, he was originally at odds with the Emperor of Jing. The Emperor seemed to be rewarding him, but in reality, he was using Huo Wujiu to humiliate Jingwang, so it was impossible for Jingwang not to hate him.

His situation would only be more tortuous than in the imperial prison.

But Jingwang did not do anything and, instead, avoided him, as if he were utterly terrifying.

Huo Wujiu involuntarily lowered his eyelashes, and his gaze fell on his legs.

The people of Southern Jing were indeed terrified of him. It was due to this fear that his meridians were damaged and his legs crippled.

Even though he had become a cripple who couldn't stand up, they were still afraid. Take yesterday as an example. It was just a matter of taking him out of prison, but the majority of the imperial guards were dispatched, and the streets along the road were strictly cordoned off.

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Chapter 4.2

The palanquin was remodeled with even more security than a prison wagon, as if he had the ability to grow wings and fly out.

Huo Wujiu had long been aware of how much he had terrified them in the past, and how much their abuse of him would now intensify.

As long as he was in enemy hands, the enemy's fear would be transformed into a knife used to stab at him. Only when he reached the point where he was within a step from death's door would they be relieved.

They were also right to do so. After all, as long as he still had a breath in him, then he, Huo Wujiu, would never sit around and wait for death.

But this Jingwang…

Huo Wujiu frowned.

He had never seen anyone like Jingwang. Jingwang was clearly afraid of him, and he had plenty of ways to dispose of him, and yet, he did nothing.

Huo Wujiu didn't believe in the slightest that Jingwang was purely benevolent, but it seemed that he didn't need to act on him yet.

Huo Wujiu closed his eyes.

He worked out a lot of the traps of his opponent as early as in the prison, preparing himself to defend against them. He knew there was bound to be a change, but he never thought…

The change he encountered was Jingwang himself.

——

Meng Qianshan, who was waiting at the door, was startled when he saw Jiang Suizhou pushing the door open by himself.

He looked at the sky and hurriedly greeted him saying, “Master, there’s still more than an hour before the grand court assembly. Why don’t you rest a bit more?”

Jiang Suizhou closed the door.

Grand Court Assembly? He knew that the Jing Dynasty didn’t practice a daily morning court session, but rather had one court session every five days, which was called the Grand Court Assembly.

It came as a surprise that the day after he came here, he would come across it.

He nodded his head and spoke gently, his voice a bit quiet, “I woke up early. It’s nothing.”

Meng Qianshan hastily answered, turned his head and ordered the servants to go to the King’s courtyard to prepare the meal, while he himself helped lead Jiang Suizhou out of the courtyard.

Jiang Suizhou hadn’t slept all night and was now dizzy and lightheaded, so he didn’t refuse and let Meng Qianshan help him.

Meng Qianshan carefully inspected him with a glance as they walked.

…*Oh boy!*

Dark blue eye bags, waxen face, unsteady gait; there was also a hidden exhaustion in the eyes.

Err…The Prince had quite an intense night, didn’t he?

Meng Qianshan took a look, then cautiously withdrew his gaze. But he couldn’t control himself, and looked back a second and third time.

He peeked too frequently that even Jiang Suizhou took notice.

Just as Jiang Suizhou boarded the palanquin parked at the gate of the courtyard, he found Meng Qianshan sneaking a peek at him again.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but frown and asked, "What's the matter?"

Meng Qianshan quickly withdrew his gaze and replied with a smile, "Nothing, nothing. I just wanted to ask Your Highness if there was anything you wanted to eat this morning."

Jiang Suizhou shook his head. "Feel free to prepare whatever you wish."

Meng Qianshan promptly responded, commanded the servants to carry the palanquin, and went in the direction of Anyin Hall.

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment and asked, "Meng Qingshan, have the arrangements been made for the courtyard where Huo Wuj…Madam Huo is moving to?"

Although his head was spinning, he still remembered his plans last night. The place where they slept last night was the ceremonial chamber used for wedding events in the royal residence. Today, Huo Wujiu was to move into his residence.

Since Jiang Suizhou had made up his mind not to provoke him, then Huo Wujiu must not be mistreated and lack these basic necessities.

Meng Qianshan was dumbfounded.

What? When did His Highness ask about such trivial matters in the residence?

Jiang Suizhou heard no response for a while, and when he turned his head sideways, he saw Meng Qianshan staring at him dumbfounded.

"Meng Qianshan," he prompted.

Meng Qingshan answered, “Your Highness, don’t worry. I arranged it ages ago!”

Jiang Suizhou paused and then said, “He seems to be badly injured. Ask someone to examine him later.”

Good lord, I can’t believe I have to find a doctor for someone else.

Meng Qianshan nodded repeatedly, “I’ll go find a doctor later to take a look at Madam Huo.”

Jiang Suizhou grunted and said, “Serve him snacks.”

After saying that, he withdrew his gaze, closed his eyes and supported his head with one arm as he took a nap.

He did not notice that Meng Qianshan, who was following beside him, had long been stunned silly by his command.

He was already screaming deep inside.

He was sent to serve the Prince since he was ten years old and had been with him for many years, but when had he ever seen him ask after these matters?!

It was not that there were no other ladies in the mansion, but even if they were favored, he had never seen such care for them from his master!

He did not forget that when the Prince arrived last night, he was as cold as frost with anger. He threw the veil down and drank the wedding cup alone yesterday. Just looking into his eyes sent cold sweat down Meng Qianahan’s spine.

But in just one night, h-he actually began to care about the Madam inside!

What else could let people change their attitude so quickly? He knew these things even if he was just a eunuch.

But come to think of it…

The Prince’s appearance of overindulgence and excessive lust today showed him a glimpse or two of the methods used by the Madam inside.

Thinking of this, Meng Qianshan couldn’t help but sigh.

Unexpectedly…unexpectedly, that cripple had such skills!

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Chapter 5.1

When Jiang Suizhou and his party left, the courtyard became completely silent.

Huo Wujiu sat up, pulled the wheelchair closer, propped himself up on the edge of the bed and moved himself into the wheelchair with a little effort.

He quietly gathered his hair, tied it up sharply behind his head, and looked out the window.

It was dawn.

He has always been very adaptable. When he was in Yangguan in the past, he was very tolerant of the airborne dust and sand in the north and could ride his horse on the Gobi desert to his heart’s content; he stayed there until his father raised his army. He also adapted quickly to the successive years of war and learned how to climb out of the mountain of corpses and blood, lead his subordinates and be a sufficiently qualified general.

Now, he also learned how to live with a pair of legs that had lost all functions in a very short time, and how to fight when alone in the enemy camp.

The sun gradually rose outside the window, and the light fell through the window onto the ground. With the rising sun, the rays advanced little by little toward Huo Wujiu.

When that light was about to envelop the edge of his wheelchair, a knock sounded at the door.

Huo Wujiu looked in the direction of the door, and his gaze sank without a trace.

He knew that if he wanted any answers, now was a good opportunity.

——

Jiang Suizhou was unaware that Meng Qianshan had secretly drafted some nasty thoughts behind his back. He closed his eyes, but wasn't very sleepy, so he contemplated the grand court session later.

At the Grand Court Assembly, not only did the hundred officials pay their respects, but they also had to discuss official business in the court. But… But considering the South Jing Emperor's professional level as recorded in history books, he reckoned they wouldn't be able to discuss any business matters in the courtroom.

What worried Jiang Suizhou was his identity.

After all, the King Jing he had become now had scarcely any records in literature, not even a few words in total.

He was the only surviving younger brother of the emperor, the sickly man who died an untimely death. To add to that, he was also gay.

It was practically blank. So, he had no idea what his current position was, much less what kind of people the original owner knew, what kind of friendships he had, and how to deal with them.

What was more worrying was that he married the infamous General Huo only yesterday. Hence, he was sure to become the target of criticism today.

Facts proved that his fears were spot on.

He wondered if there was a way to solve his official post. All in all, once Jiang Suizhou changed into his official robe, he realized what his official rank was; when Meng Qianshan brought him the ivory court tablet, he knew where he should stand when he was in the court later.

The major he studied was unduly fitting, giving him more or less an advantage in this matter of crossing.

However, his major didn’t teach him how to face various strange glances from civil and military officials.

From the moment he got off the palanquin and entered the Kaiyang Gate, many of the officials nearby were given a start, and countless eyes looked him up and down non-stop. One or two people looking at him was just fine, but almost everyone looked at him a few times. Thus, it was inevitable for Jiang Suizhou to be on the tenterhooks.

Those gazes were a mixture of Schadenfreude, abhorrence and disdain, and also grief. Some wanted to speak but then hesitated.

A bold official even went to Jiang Suizhou’s side, bumped him with his shoulder and said with a smile, “Your Highness must have been exhausted last night. When it comes to luck with romance, you are indeed blessed!”

From his official uniform, he wasn’t a high-ranking official from the third rank.

Although he wasn’t in a high official position and was only idly working in the Ministry of Rites, he was also a first-rate prince. If he dared to drip acid with sarcasm on him, there must be someone backing him up.

The treacherous minister, Pang Shao, who was well-known in history books, was in this dynasty.

Jiang Suizhou gave him a casual look, but made no response.

His cold and arrogant eyes have always been a strong deterrent, so with a touch of warning in them, he immediately rendered the official frightened and stunned. The wretched smile on his face, which was a bit of schadenfreude and improper intimacy, was also put away awkwardly.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze from him, speeded up his pace, and walked away from him.

His appearance somewhat deterred some people and made the second half of his journey to the imperial court much smoother.

It also spared him some energy to scrutinize some things on the side.

Before the Jing Dynasty fled south, the capital of the country was in Yecheng. Three years ago, Huo Wujiu led the Liang army and invaded the capital. The previous emperor, Emperor Jing Ling, fled south in haste with his family and numerous officials and died on the way. The present ruler, Jiang Shunheng, hastily fled to Yuhang and changed his name to Lin’an, which became the new capital of the country.

At present, it has only been three years since the capital was established here, and the palace has been hastily built up.

The palace was roughly built, and the blueprint was also a mess. It took a glance to see the result of the rushed work. According to historical records, after the emperor fled to Lin’an, he insisted that wouldn’t be emperor without a royal palace, which forced South Jing to build the Imperial City in a hurry within half a year.

Rough as it was, the cost was, by no means, paltry. Along the way, it seemed that the whole imperial city was resplendent and decidedly extravagant. At first glance, a large sum of gold and silver was spent.

Jiang Suizhou could not help but sigh in his heart.

There was no bias in the historical records of the preposterous deeds of the Emperor of South Jing.

He walked up the long white marble steps in front of Guangyuan Hall and saw that many courtiers were already standing inside. Because they studied historical materials in the school, everything was fine and detailed, so Jiang Suizhou didn’t have much trouble finding his position and stood there.

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Chapter 5.2

The one standing in front of him was an old minister around his 50s or 60s. A look at his court uniform told him that he was second-ranked, a whole rank higher than Jiang Suizhou.

When he saw Jiang Suizhou coming, the old minister turned his head and nodded at him, as a greeting.

“Your Highness King Jing has come early today,” he said with a light smile.

As he turned around, Jiang Suizhou read the writing on his court tablet.

Minister of Rites, Ji You; he was Jiang Suizhou’s immediate boss.

He was detached and amicable, so he was probably not close to King Jing. Jiang Suizhou smiled in response, also nodded at him and greeted him good morning.

Ji You glanced around and found that the surroundings were quiet. There wasn’t anyone nearby, so he whispered, “Your Highness has suffered from an injustice. Just bear it, and it will pass.”

After saying that, he nodded at Jiang Suizhou with goodwill and then turned around once more.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t quite understand his meaning, so he responded and ended the conversation with him.

…However, he soon understood what Ji You meant.

When the hour arrived, the morning sun jumped on the glorious golden glazed roof, the drums sounded outside the Zhengyang Hall, followed by

the eunuchs singing loudly.

History's most famous fatuous and self-indulgent ruler, South Jing's Emperor, Emperor Jing You, His Majesty Jiang Shunheng, has arrived.

In the thousands of years of history, there were few who could be dubbed "You" by posterity. After all, most emperors rendered great service. It was ultimately rare to have muddle-headed ones whom the later generations would take their posthumous titles to point at their noises and ridicule.

Jiang Shunheng and his father, whose posthumous title was "Ling", accounted for two.

Jiang Suizhou followed the civil and military officials with the salute, then looked up to the throne.

He only saw a puffy fat man in his thirties sitting in the middle of the throne. He was wrapped in a twelve-chapter pattern black imperial robe. He was sitting crookedly, and hangings on top of his head swayed to and fro, tinkling loudly.

Before Jiang Suizhou could take a closer look, he locked eyes with the latter.

The fat man's small eyes patrolled the courtiers, then precisely found Jiang Suizhou. All at once, he revealed a look that harbored evil designs, yet with an extremely joyful glow.

Jiang Suizhou's heart thumped.

As expected, the next moment, the Emperor of Jing spoke.

"Fifth brother, I gave you that beautiful concubine, did you enjoy him well last night?"

He asked in a deliberately ambiguous measured cadence, and half of the court ministers laughed along with him. The original solemn atmosphere of the court hall suddenly became ludicrous.

Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth.

The five-day dynasty will not be used to deliberate, was wrecked into this way, not blame the history books scold you faint king, not blame you Jing dynasty died.

The Great Court Assembly held once every five days was not used for discussion, but was wrecked into this state. He shouldn't blame history books for calling him a fatuous and self-indulgent ruler, or the fall of the Jing Dynasty under his rule.

However, from that sentence, Jiang Suizhou pinpointed a different undertone.

The Emperor of Jing arrived, harboring evil intentions, and the courtiers either followed suit, or looked unsightly and kept their mouths shut. It was obvious that the original owner wasn't popular in the court. The matter of the emperor giving him a concubine was also killing two birds with one stone, humiliating him on both.

Hence, he naturally couldn't show happiness.

With this thought, Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth and showed a humiliated look, as if reluctant to mention yesterday's incident. "This younger brother thanks Brother Emperor for your reward."

The Emperor of Jing laughed uproariously.

"No thanks, no thanks! Hey, I heard that yesterday, you did not come out of his room all night?" He said.

Jiang Suizhou, "…"

This fatuous emperor hasn't had enough yet.

As expected, there were indeed spies of the latter in his house. Moreover, the latter also did not hide it in the slightest and said so openly.

…In all likelihood, it isn't that this fatuous ruler is frank and righteous, but is indeed dim-witted.

Jiang Suizhou slandered silently, but his expression matched his words, with traces of embarrassment.

When the latter saw his appearance, he really became more excited.

"When you got up early in the morning, did you call for a doctor? Fifth Brother, you should take care of your health. You were born with this ailment, so how can you stand the torment?"

After speaking, he also greeted a certain official in the front row, "Uncle, did you see? My fifth brother's face is so white that I can see the dark circles under his eyes from afar! Last night, there must have been a lot of tossing and turning. Hahahahaha!"

Hearing this title, the minister he addressed was definitely Pang Shao.

Pang Shao was the brother of Empress Dowager Pang, and he has the official rank of Grand Minister over the Masses. According to historical records, he was restrained in the previous dynasty. After Jiang Shunheng ascended to the throne, he revealed his true form and only focused on seizing power by hoarding money. For Jiang Shunheng, he was a connivance. For Jiang Shunheng, it was all but connivance and flattery.

Therefore, the empress also liked this uncle very much.

Seriously, upon hearing the Emperor of Jing's words, a low, muffled laughter came from the front row of officials. There was no comment, nor the slightest intention of admonishing him to restrain himself.

Jiang Suizhou even heard dashes of pleasure in his laughter.

It immediately became clear to him.

It turned out that not only did he have an ancestor who was going to kill him sooner or later, but he was also in a tight spot in the court.

No matter how bitter Jiang Suizhou was deep inside, he no longer wanted to dwell on it.

He stood there and listened indifferently to the emperor’s wanton mocking and sarcasm, responding now and then. The more he talked, the more excited he became. It was obvious that he had exhausted his pitiful brain to come up with this wonderful marriage, waiting for this day.

Jiang Suizhou was too lazy to retort and let him kick up a fuss.

Just then, there were a few faint, throat-clearing sounds coming from the front row of officials. The Emperor paused and immediately looked in that direction.

Then, he immediately showed a look of understanding and laughed out loud some more.

“Fifth Brother, I have thought about it yesterday,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou raised his head and saw him narrowing those small eyes and smiling maliciously at him.

“The father of that Madam Huo in your house, wasn’t he the Marquis of Dingbei Marquis of our Great Jing back then? After all the ups and downs, we’ve become a family again. Our Great Jing is also considered Madam Huo’s maternal family,” he said.

“In that case, the rule of visiting the bride’s home after three days can not be abolished. I’ve decided. After three days, bring Madam Huo to the palace to return to his maternal home. What do you think?”

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Chapter 6.1

Return to the bride’s home?

Huo Wujiu exterminated the emperor’s country, and the latter killed Huo Wujiu’s father. They were already at odds and ends, so how could he claim that they were Huo Wujiu’s family?

He said it was returning to the bride’s home, but his unabashed tone clearly showed his desire to find an excuse to taunt and humiliate Huo Wujiu.

With his knowledge of thousands of years of history, Jiang Suizhou also had some understanding of this fatuous ruler.

The Hou Zhu, as stupid as he was, certainly couldn’t have come up with this humiliating trick to force Huo Wujiu back to his maternal home.

Jiang Suizhou caught the look shared between the Emperor and Pang Shao.

Nine out of ten, it was Pang Shao who was in cahoots with the Hou Zhu. The latter wanted to take Huo Wujiu out, and Pang Shao wanted to please him, so Pang Shao must have come up with this idea for him.

The two of them hit it off immediately. They would each happily obtain their desires. He, on the other hand, would end up suffering.

Regardless of who wanted to humiliate Huo Wujiu, in Huo Wujiu’s perspective, he, Jiang Suizhou, and they were jackals of the same lair.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t want to drive someone to their death. He could turn a blind eye to it, but he didn’t want to use his own head as a bargaining chip.

Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth.

He had to refuse for Huo Wujiu, and he had to come up with a sound reason.

He paused, and his exquisite, almost lush face showed tinges of revulsion and embarrassment.

“Brother Emperor, that’s unnecessary.” He lowered his eyes, his slender eyelashes blocking the emotions in his eyes and aptly posing a gesture of refusal. “A cripple is hardly presentable and would only provoke Brother Emperor’s disgust.”

He spoke slowly, exhibiting his disgust between the lines.

Jiang Suizhou wove his words beautifully, and each word was seemingly in consideration for the latter. However, the people around him knew when they heard him that he himself was disgraced in saying these words.

Of course, he was also a Prince of the country. The mere thought of entering the palace with a prisoner of war “to return to the bridal home” was too funny and too humiliating.

Many courtiers had a look of schadenfreude on their faces.

And when the Emperor heard this, he became even more spirited.

“What? Are you unwilling to bring him out? Fifth Brother, you’ve only been with him in the bridal chamber last night. How come you are so heartless today?”

When Jiang Suizhou heard his loony tone, he was inevitably disgusted, but he had to continue acting.

He paused, as if totally embarrassed that he had been intimate with the other party. After a while, he lowered his voice and said, “Brother Emperor, this is different.”

The Hou Zhu dissolved into laughter, and a cheerful atmosphere permeated the entire courtroom.

Pang Shao cleared his throat again.

The Hou Zhu glanced at him and saw Pang Shao winking at him from below, reminding him of the plan.

Long before the court session, his uncle told him that he could severely humiliate Jiang Suizhou by proposing to let Huo Wujiu return to his maternal home. That idea was fine. However, it was paramount to use this matter as a bargaining chip in exchange for the goodies in Jiang Suizhou's hands.

Although he was not interested in whatever good things Jiang Suizhou had in his hands, he was ultimately delighted in the act of snatching things away from him.

Even if he was now no longer the poor First Prince who was ignored by his father and could only watch how loved Jiang Suizhou was, even if he was now the Emperor, his hobbies remained unchanged.

He cleared his throat, shifted into a more comfortable sitting position, raised his leg and stepped on the throne floor cushion.

"All right, since Fifth Brother is reluctant and wants to hide your wife in a golden house, I will not force you." He stretched his voice and smiled. "But then, since you want to hide your beauty, you've got to give something in exchange. Don't you think so?"

Jiang Suizhou frowned.

Sure enough, he had guessed right. Pang Shao was behind the Hou Zhu's evil tricks. Since he had made the Hou Zhu happy, Pang Shao naturally wouldn't be without payment. If the Hou Zhu didn't plan on giving this remuneration to him, then Pang Shao would obtain it himself.

But…He seemed to be merely an idle Prince with an idle post. What was worth their scheming?

Jiang Suizhou paused and tentatively answered, “Brother Emperor, please enlighten me.”

The Hou Zhu cleared his throat.

“I have thought about it. If I want to build an ancestral hall in the palace, the Ministry of Works should do it, not the Ministry of Rites. It just so happens that Luan Zhaoyi has been begging me these days, wanting her father to come and share your burdens. Fifth Brother, no matter what, we can’t let the beauty be sad, right?”

Jiang Suizhou’s brow jumped.

Oh, I see.

During the reign of Emperor Jing You of Southern Jing, the corruption of the court reached its peak when Pang Shao was in power. Officials have been corrupt since ancient times, and construction projects were the easiest way to launder money. The largest ill-gotten fortunes were certainly from the construction of palaces.

For this reason, Pang Shao would let the Emperor build a palace whenever he made a fuss about building a new one. In any case, when a palace was built, the money would flow from the national treasury to his own pockets.

At present, the renovations of the palace must still be underway, so Pang Shao was coveting this lucrative job. Nevertheless…Jiang Suizhou didn’t quite understand how such an obvious piece of fat meat fell into his hands.

He did not say anything for a while, his eyes roamed around the assembly room.

Some people remained calm and composed as they watched the show, while others were cold-faced and silent. A few officials looked nervous, glancing straight at him.

Under the turbulent dark tide, there were clear distinctions, as if there were two factions in the dark.

A terrible conjecture suddenly sprouted in Jiang Suizhou’s heart.

From this situation…It seemed that he also had some hidden power in the court. It was those people who found ways to stuff this errand into his hands.

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Chapter 6.2

Pang Shao manipulated the Emperor to say these words, but presumably, he was also fighting with him.

In this case, the situation was much more complicated. If he retreated at this juncture, he might harm more than his own interests.

But…

Firstly, he was in the dark and had no clue about what was going on in the court. He didn't even know who was under his command. Even if he took over the job, he was afraid there would be trouble.

Secondly, the question before him was making him choose between a rock and a hard place. Either give up this hard-earned benefit of Jingwang, offending all his fellow officials, or bring Huo Wujiu into the palace for some humiliation, offending Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou sighed.

This was simply grilling him. But in contrast, his life was more important.

On top of the throne, the Hou Zhu was still urging him strangely, "Fifth Brother, why aren't you saying anything? The beauty or the cushy job, you have to choose one."

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes, and this time, the revulsion and anger on his face was no longer faked.

"As Brother Emperor said, I shouldn't overstep my bounds," Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth and replied unhurriedly.

He saw the emperor smile all the more smug.

——

The sky brightened, and the trees outside the window swayed about. The sun shone brightly through the thin green branches, spreading mottled shadows onto the smooth dark floor tiles.

Dust particles danced silently in the air, making the rays show a bit of yarn-like essence.

It was a dazzling tranquility.

In the mansion, Doctor Zhou was paralyzed on his knees with his back straight and a thin layer of cold sweat dripped down onto his forehead.

He was wide-eyed, and his neck was stiff, not daring to move.

Against the pulsating veins in his neck was a sharp, blood-stained wooden chip.

The blood was not his, but he could feel how sharp the piece of wood was. It was capable of cutting his throat and killing him instantly.

“Madam…General! General! What exactly do you want to ask? Just ask!” He trembled and shivered.

A low voice rang out above his head.

That was Huo Wujiu in his wheelchair. He sat there, bent over and with one arm lazily resting on his knee. His other hand was holding the blood-stained wooden chip.

He held it firmly against Doctor Zhou’s throat.

“What did he send you here for?” he asked. He tilted his head, eyes downcast and looking down condescendingly at the man kneeling before him.

Doctor Zhou shivered and told the truth, “I’m here to treat your injuries on the order of Qianshan-gonggong!”

Huo Wujiu said coldly, “Tell the truth.”

Doctor Zhou was on the verge of tears. “I am telling the truth!”

Huo Wujiu coldly looked him up and down for a moment.

He didn’t appear to be lying, but that didn’t rule out the possibility of him pretending either.

Just now, as soon as this person came and said he was the doctor of the mansion, Huo Wujiu had a conjecture deep inside.

The Emperor of Jing was a fool, but Jingwang was not. Jiang Shunheng caught him and only wanted to torture for fun, but Jingwang didn’t have this only purpose.

He hadn’t made a move, but he certainly had plans. Jingwang might want to get something from him, maybe the Liang army intelligence, or he might try to use him to fight against Jiang Shunheng.

Although his performance yesterday was inconsistent with the rumors, rumors were not groundless.

Therefore, if Jingwang wanted to relax his vigilance and control him, the best way was to prescribe medicine to him with the help of doctors.

Huo Wujiu looked at the mansion doctor who was shaking like a sieve, his gaze cold and unmoved.

“Then open your mouth,” he ordered indifferently.

The manor doctor trembled and obeyed.

The next moment, a pill suddenly fell into his mouth, and before he could react, his jaw was tightly pinched and jerked upward.

The pill fell into his belly.

The doctor’s pupils trembled, and immediately, he felt a sharp burning pain that rose up from his stomach.

In front of him, the handsome, god-like General slowly and methodically withdrew the wooden chip and sat up with his knees propped up.

The bottomless abyss that were his eyes were calm and waveless, akin to the impermanence of hell that tortured lives.

He leaned on the backrest of his wheelchair.

It was clear that he was sitting in a very simple wooden chair, but his bearing was like sitting on the tiger skin in the Prince’s tent.

He lowered his eyes, looked at Doctor Zhou, and said, “This medicine can corrode the five organs in less than a moment. While I still have the antidote in my hand, tell me. What exactly did they want you to do when they sent you here?”

Doctor Zhou cried bitterly, “I’m really not lying to you!” The burning pain in his abdomen had already made him tremble with fear. He was so anxious and scared that he woefully fished over the medical kit he had thrown aside and shivered as he turned it over to Huo Wujiu.

“I really have orders to treat your injuries! These are all wound medicines. If you don’t believe me, I can use any of them on myself to prove it to you!”

While speaking, he hurriedly poured out the stuff in the medical kit and was about to open them one by one for Huo Wujiu to see.

Huo Wujiu sized him up quietly.

This time, he believed that this man was telling the truth.

He was actually sent to treat his wounds?

For some reason, Jiang Suizhou’s appearance under the red candles last night flashed before his eyes.

There was no doubt that he was like a rabbit who was scared of his own ears atop his head, yet he had to pretend to be vicious.

…Besides, he probably didn’t have the guts to even drug him.

Huo Wujiu quietly looked at the mansion doctor who was on the ground. A moment later, he took out a vial from his sleeves and threw a dark brown pill at him.

“One lasts for three months. Don’t say a word about today’s affairs. Come back to me for the medicine after three months,” Huo Wujiu said.

Doctor Zhou quickly picked up the pill and stuffed it into his mouth.

“Since you’re here to treat my injuries, then get up and take a look.”

Huo Wujiu said indifferently and glanced down at the small medicine vial in his hand.

He only had a total of two medicines on him. When he was imprisoned, the soldier who escorted him was Lou Yue, an old friend of his father, so he stealthily stuffed it in Huo Wujiu belongings during the search, leaving him something to save himself with.

One of them could quickly stop bleeding when seriously injured, but after swallowing it, it would cause severe pain in the five organs. However, the pain would disappear after only a moment. The other was to boost qi and enrich blood. It was most useful when trekking long distances in the snow. He glanced at the mansion doctor who wiped his tears and stumbled up from the ground, withdrew his gaze and quietly put the vial back in his sleeves.

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Chapter 7.1

Perhaps before today, Doctor Zhou's understanding of the word "desperado" was only in the literal sense.

But today, he finally understood profoundly what "desperado" meant.

The man on the bed was clearly wounded all over. He was half dead, and his pulse was weak, yet he was still able to ignore it. Huo Wujiu calmly allowed him to remove his rotting flesh and sprinkle a powder on him, and had time to remind him not to try to play tricks and to resist stealing the antidote from him in advance.

The Doctor did not dare to tremble as he administered the medicine to him.

When he removed his upper robe, the whiplash marks on his tightly muscular body crashed into his eyes. He was tortured so heavily that his flesh was torn to shreds, with new injuries overlapping old ones. Perhaps because the torture devices were dipped in salt water, those wounds almost had no scabs and had the tendency to fester.

After over a month of imprisonment, it was obvious from the sight of his body that a day must have crawled by like a year.

If these injuries were on someone else, even if they weren't in immense pain, they must have long been immobilized. Yet just by looking at his face, this man would appear uninjured if he had a robe on.

In all of Doctor Zhou's years of medical practice, he had never seen such a ruthless man.

It was said that people who were cruel to themselves would never be soft on others. Therefore, the doctor did not doubt the authenticity of his poisoning

and had to resign himself to his fate. From now on, in all likelihood, he would have to follow Huo Wujiu' orders.

The process of applying medicine was quite tedious. Only when Huo Wujiu's upper body was almost wrapped in gauze did it come to an end.

"Your injuries are too severe, and you have already lost qi and blood. Afterward, while your wounds heal, you might develop inflammation or fever, which can be life-threatening in serious cases. I will prescribe a few oral medicines for you. You–"

Huo Wujiu, who had been silent for a long time, suddenly spoke and interrupted him.

"Take a look at my legs," he ordered.

Manor Doctor Zhou froze at the interruption before realizing what he was talking about.

However, before he could react, Huo Wujiu had quietly leaned down, tugging his robe up with one hand and pulling his trouser legs up with the other.

It was a pair of long, straight legs that looked full of strength.

However, under the scars and blood stains, the horrific wounds on them were bone deep and vividly clear.

Those were wounds that cut through flesh and blood and severed the meridians.

Doctor Zhou only took a glance, and then averted his eyes in panic—— His medical skills might be good, but he wasn't a peerless genius doctor. With just one look, he knew that there was no cure or remedy for such an injury.

He looked towards Huo Wujiu, just to see those deep black eyes quietly looking at the wound that exposed his bloody flesh.

Huo Wujiu was so calm that he scared Doctor Zhou.

“Can I still stand up?” He heard Huo Wujiu ask.

Doctor Zhou trembled and deliberated for a moment before carefully replying, “I’d better bandage your legs as well. If the wounds fester, they’ll be difficult to deal with.”

He carefully avoided Huo Wujiu’s question, which was another way of telling him that it was hopeless.

Huo Wujiu fell silent.

After a moment, he grunted, let go of the fabric clutched in his hand, sat up, and leaned back into the backrest of his wheelchair.

Huo Wujiu was extremely quiet.

Doctor Zhou did not dare to look at Huo Wujiu’s face again, but as he bowed forward to apply medicine to the latter’s leg, Doctor Zhou saw his hand resting on his knee.

The veins in the back of his hand bulged, and his five fingers were tightened, clenching the old wounds on his hand.

——

After Jiang Suizhou uttered those words, he distinctly felt the Hou Zhu’s satisfaction.

Or rather, what the Hou Zhu was satisfied with wasn’t the words he uttered, but the displeasure that showed on Jiang Suizhou’s face when he replied.

His Majesty seemed to be particularly malicious toward Jiang Suizhou, and liked to base his pleasure on the latter’s pain.

With Jiang Suizhou’s agreement, the matter naturally came to an end. His Majesty seemed to no longer be interested in the court. Several officials presented memorials, but he listened to them with a lack of interest, then waved his hand and said to let the Grand Minister of the Masses decide.

The courtroom seemingly turned into Pang Shao's turf.

Hence, the morning court session did not last long and ended with a yawn of His Majesty.

Jiang Suizhou followed the officials out of the Guangyuan Hall and pursed his lips.

He really didn't expect that the purpose of the Hou Zhu's trip to the court was to taunt and jeer at him.

But so far, the Hou Zhu hated Huo Wujiu and, at the same time, didn't treat Jiang Suizhou any better. Currently, Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu were tethered to a rope, so it could count as saving trouble by letting the Hou Zhu vent his anger.

Jiang Suizhou cast his eyes down and descended the stairs step by step.

He initially thought he would breathe his last breath, but to his surprise, he was able to walk arduously up till now.

Just then, someone passed by him.

"I'm really bitterly disappointed with Your Highness's move!" The voice was old and gloomy.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes, and saw an old minister with white hair two or three feet away, walking toward him .

As soon as he turned around, Jiang Suizhou froze.

…He's practically identical to the portraits in history materials!

This man was, without a doubt, the only remaining good minister at the end of the Jing Dynasty, the Minister of Ceremonies, Qi Min.

This man served as a minister for three generations of the Jing Dynasty. He was honest and upright. He held to his principles and never yielded to

pressure. He was a rare courtier who dared to stand up to Pang Shao in court in the late Jing Dynasty.

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Chapter 7.2

Jiang Suizhou looked at him, somewhat stunned and speechless for a while. Qi Min showed him no mercy, and after a glance at him, he flicked his sleeve and said, “How can Your Highness give away the efforts of your colleagues in the Ministry of Rites for the sake of your dignity?!”

After saying that, he stalked off without a backward glance.

Jiang Suizhou returned to his senses.

…He did not expect that the speculation he deduced in the courtroom just now was actually true.

Although Jiang Suizhou seemed to be just an idle prince, those silent ministers in the court imperceptibly regarded him as their backbone. Qi Min’s rebuke totally confirmed his suspicions.

Seeing that Qi Min was about to walk away, Jiang Suizhou took two steps to catch up with him and hurriedly spoke.

“Does the Minister of Ceremonies think that I only did that for my own dignity?” he countered solemnly.

Having confirmed this, Jiang Suizhou knew that at this moment, he definitely couldn’t stay silent or do nothing.

All ministers who joined factions had purposes. They secretly gathered under his command, and even got Qi Min involved in the muddy water. Eight out of ten, their goal was to fight against Pang Shao.

Jiang Suizhou still had three years to spend with these people. If he didn’t pacify them, he would die in the court battle before Huo Wujiu could chop

his head off.

So…

What he had to do now was to fool them.

Take this Qi Min for example. Although he was a three-dynasty veteran minister and the respected Minister of Ceremonies, in the end, he was only an official in charge of the rituals of the ancestral temples. This kind of high-ranking official, though high in position, had no real power. If he conducted himself upright, he should not have engaged in any power struggle to secure personal gain.

People like him were quite scary.

Sure enough, Qi Min paused when he heard Jiang Suizhou's words and slowed down.

Seeing this, Jiang Suizhou sneered and put on an unfathomable tone.

"The Grand Minister over the Masses openly manipulated His Majesty in the court today to compete with me. Do you think he isn't capable of doing other tricks in the future?" He said, "The construction of the ancestral hall concerns the clan ancestors. If something happens here, this is not something you and I can afford."

As expected, Qi Min did not make another sound.

Jiang Suizhou gave a faint smile, quickened his pace, and brushed past him. "Minister, my plan isn't to save my dignity," Jiang Suizhou said. "Rather, it's to protect all your lives."

——

He left such a meaningful sentence and walked away without looking back.

After all, leaving the rest unsaid and giving him room to ponder and speculate would bring out the best effect.

Not to mention he was still a conservative old man.

When Jiang Suizhou got on the carriage waiting outside Kaiyang Gate, he secretly peeked back and saw Qi Min standing in front of the Zhengyang Gate, looking solemn and pensive.

…He truly fooled him.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but smile a little.

Although he was now at a dead end with wolves in front and tigers behind, he found pleasure in this adversity…It was pretty exhilarating.

For example, he bluffed to the famous loyal minister and let the old man go. The minister probably wouldn't eat well for several days because of Jiang Suizhou's ambiguous words.

This feeling was quite marvelous.

Although he originally chose to stay in school just to try to be an idler disguised as a high intellectual, studying history was his hobby.

After all, his family had been chaotic since he was a child. His father relied on what little money he had to change wives more frequently than changing cars. There were not only many children in the family, but each also had their own mothers. Those children had cherished their childhood, but Jiang Suizhou was rather miserable. He was too quiet and uncommunicative.

Whenever his father's other children played court schemes at home, Jiang Suizhou hid in his room alone to read books.

But when all was said and done, books were books and were nothing more than words. Now, he could see those characters in history books thousands of years ago, walking to and fro in front of him. It seemed… quite intriguing.

Jiang Suizhou has always been very good at finding the silver lining in things.

So he put the curtain down in high spirits and sat back.

As the carriage set off, he looked at the scenery outside through the floating brocade curtain while devising plans deep within.

He must not neglect the main ministers of the dynasty, but above all, there was still Huo Wujiu in his manor. He has traveled from the future and had read enough ‘spoilers’ to know that no matter how much they fought against it, the dynasty would still perish, and the country would be destroyed after three years.

Since this was the case, there was no point in fighting Pang Shao to death. Therefore, Jiang Suizhou just needed to appease and fool them enough to get through these three years.

The carriage rocked as it wandered through the wide streets of Lin’an, turned around Qinghe Square and finally stopped in front of Jingwang Manor.

Jiang Suizhou got off the carriage and headed to Anyin Hall where he was staying.

He was an idle official, and he also didn’t have to go to the government office to work today after attending the Grand Court Assembly. He wanted to rush to Jingwang’s study to go through the letters and folders in his room to get a better understanding of everything.

But at the entrance of Anyin Hall, a sobbing maid stopped him.

“…Your Highness!” The maid looked exquisitely dressed and must have been someone’s personal maid.

“Madam Gu was wronged this morning and is crying at this moment. Please be the judge, Your Highness!”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

…Who’s Madam Gu?!

He frowned and asked solemnly, “…What happened?”

The maid answered, “This morning, the new Concubine Huo moved courtyards and happened to run into My Lady. My Lady just casually chatted with him, but he raised his hand against her. He injured My Lady!”

Jiang Suizhou’s relaxed expression stiffened little by little with the maid’s report.

…He did not expect that the original owner had other concubines in the harem in addition to marrying Huo Wujiu.

It was even more beyond his imagination that a man would fight a woman in his manor.

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Chapter 8.1

The servants who went to pick up Huo Wujiu to move courtyards arrived when Doctor Zhou was administering medicine to him.

When Huo Wujiu married, he came alone, so there was no dowry luggage to move. Hence, at this moment, only two maids and a tall brawny manservant went.

The two maids should have been assigned to serve Huo Wujiu. When they came in, their faces looked surly. They looked down and indifferent.

Seeing that Doctor Zhou was applying medicine to Huo Wujiu, one of the maids opened her mouth and said, “Doctor Zhou, how much longer will it take you to treat him?”

They didn’t look at Huo Wujiu in the slightest, much less salute him, as if they didn’t see him.

While bandaging Huo Wujiu, Doctor Zhou replied, “Hold on, ladies. He’ll be ready in no time.”

The maids grunted, turned around, and said, “Then be quick. We’ll wait outside.”

After saying that, the few of them turned around and went out.

They went out of the room but didn’t close the door, and left it ajar instead. The maid who didn’t say anything before spoke up, “How annoying. If we wait a little longer, it will be noon, and we will have to walk in the sun again on the way.”

The other maid said, “You don’t say. We’re unlucky.”

Hearing this, the maid laughed a couple of times and said, “Unlucky? The sun is not bad luck. We’re only unlucky that we were assigned to this job.”

“Right? Who wants to come and serve a disabled enemy? It’s just not our luck today.”

They made no effort to tone down in the slightest, as if they were afraid that the person inside the room couldn’t hear them. The sharp, clipped voices of the girls reached Doctor Zhou’s ears.

Doctor Zhou’s legs started to tremble.

Others might not know, but he knew that the man sitting in a wheelchair in front of him was the King of Hell, who could kill without batting an eye.

Doctor Zhou was so petrified that he broke out in a cold sweat and carefully raised his eyes to look at Huo Wujiu.

He only saw him sitting in place. There wasn’t a lift in his eyes, nor a bit of reaction, as if he hadn’t heard anything.

The sunrays fell gently onto the side of his face.

Perhaps the sun was so bright that it gave the impression that the motionless cripple in front of him should be an extremely proud man.

Doctor Zhou dared not say more. He swiftly withdrew his gaze and bandaged his legs properly.

“Afterward, you mustn’t let your wounds get wet. The dressings must be changed once every three days. I will report this truthfully to His Highness,” Doctor Zhou said.

Huo Wujiu made no response.

The doctor then packed up his medical kit and retreated.

Not long after, the two maids came into the room. They instructed the brawny manservant to push the wheelchair forward, so they could take Huo

Wujiu away and send him to his future residence.

The wheelchair was in no way easy to push.

The wheelchair was originally large and heavy, and because it was for Huo Wujiu, it was only a tool for transporting prisoners. The wheelchair was terribly rough, and the two wheels on the chair taken from a prison wagon were barely installed.

From the room to the backyard where the wives and concubines live, they had to pass through the gardens of Jingwang's residence if they wanted to take a shortcut. The gardens in the sunny south have always been a sceneric place for strolls. There were streams and ponds everywhere, and small bridges or gravel paths were built for people to walk on.

The two maids loathed their job and didn't want to bake in the sun, so they insisted on walking through the garden. Even if the manservant was strong, pushing the wheelchair took great effort.

After walking for a while, he couldn't keep up with the two.

The two maids only cared about moving forward, and only a while later did they turn around and find that Huo Wujiu had fallen behind.

They have long been resentful because they were assigned to serve Huo Wujiu. He was not only a cripple, but an easy target to bully. Hence, when their master did not say a word from the beginning to the end, they became increasingly presumptuous.

One of them turned around and said to the manservant, "Why are you walking so slowly? Is it because she is a lady of an eminent family, so you're afraid of dirtying her embroidered shoes?"

The manservant pushing the wheelchair was simple and honest. Upon hearing this, sweat dripped down his forehead in anxiety, and he hurriedly explained, "Sister, it's not my fault. The road is really bumpy…"

The other coldly retorted, "Who's blaming you? Hurry and keep up."

Since it wasn’t his fault, then whose was it? There was no fifth person present.

The manservant did not dare to say anything and could only diligently push the wheelchair. The wheels were not sturdy enough to move steadily. In his nervousness, his hands lost control, and the wheelchair suddenly tilted down and was about to tumble to the ground.

But then the man in the wheelchair, who remained silent the whole time, raised his hand lightly and pressed it on the armrest.

The wheelchair stabilized.

The manservant promptly bowed to apologize and thank his master, but out of nowhere, he heard a mellow voice from the front.

“What’s all the noise about?”

When the manservant looked up, he saw two people standing under the weeping willow by the pond ahead, followed by a group of servants. One of them was dressed in green, with pale, delicate and pretty features, looking as gentle as jade. The other one was utterly gorgeous. He was a man, but was naturally enticing. He was dressed in red.

They were the two concubines in the mansion.

The manservant hurriedly followed the two maids and saluted, “Good day, Madam Gu. Good day, Madam Xu.”

The red-clad Madam Gu waved his hand and told them to get up. He stepped forward and said in a lazy voice, “I thought it was someone. So it’s the new Madam Huo who joined the household yesterday.”

As he spoke, he walked up to Huo Wujiu and stopped in his tracks.

But Huo Wujiu acted as if he didn’t see the man.

“How old are you, Madam Huo? You must be 23 years old, right?” He spoke. “You’re a few years younger than me, so just call me elder brother in

the future.”

With that, he smilingly stood in front of Huo Wujiu. His stance suggested that he would block the path and wouldn’t go away if Huo Wujiu ignored him.

Huo Wujiu did not lift a single eyelid.

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Chapter 8.2

The atmosphere turned awkward for a spell. The green-clad Madam Xu nearby paused and came forward, saying, “Chang Yun, let’s go.”

Gu Changyun didn’t appreciate this and smiled slowly, “Xu Du, don’t let him get away with it. He’s newlywed, but he doesn’t even greet his elder brothers. What kind of etiquette is this?”

Xu Du glanced at Gu Changyun and frowned.

He watched as Gu Changyun stretched out his hand, trying to pinch Huo Wujiu’s chin.

“He’s handsome. Raise your head and let Brother have a look…”

His voice came to an abrupt halt.

Huo Wujiu was looking down, but he seemed to have eyes on his forehead. He raised his hand without warning, accurately grasped Gu Changyun’s wrist and stopped his movement.

The next moment, he exerted force and twisted it ruthlessly.

His bones made a fragile cracking sound.

——

Jiang Suizhou naturally did not want to care.

He dared to vouch with his own head that General Huo wasn’t the one who started the quarrel from jealousy. It must be the other party who provoked

him first. If so, why would he want to offend Huo Wujiu because of this person's foolish provocation?

Fight if you want to fight. What was the use of crying? Even women from other houses' knew how to pull hair. If they were beaten, they would fight back. If he was so capable, he should fight back.

Jiang Suizhou glanced at the maid indifferently, and said, "I have important business." After speaking, he tried to bypass the maid and enter the courtyard.

Unexpectedly, the maid actually took two steps forward and stopped him.

"Your Lord, my master is badly hurt! The mansion doctor said that person was a hairbreadth away from breaking my master's wrist!"

That wasn't even close to the truth.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes impatiently, and was about to speak, but he saw the expression of Meng Qianshan next to him.

This little eunuch was silly and simple. All his emotions were written on his face.

At this moment, Meng Qianshan was staring at him blankly in astonishment, as if he had done something unbelievable.

And in front of him, the tearful maid still stopped him, not the least bit afraid of him flaring up.

Jiang Suizhou remembered that when he transmigrated last night, a maid bumped into a water basin and was so terrified, as if she'd die.

The maid before him dared to behave arrogantly only because of his favor.

He believed that the "Madam Gu" they were referring to was probably the original owner's favorite concubine.

Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth. He could hardly contain himself and cursed the original owner secretly.

…It's fine if you wanted to spoil a man, but you could have spoiled someone who caused no trouble!

He took a deep breath and counseled himself inwardly. He came here all by himself, and if there were no accidents, he would have to stay here for some years. Hence, even if he hid, he would have to meet the people close to the original body sooner or later.

…Including his messy concubines.

While inwardly letting off steam, Jiang Suizhou tilted his head and said lightly to the maid, "I'll go and see him during dinner."

The maid immediately stopped her tears and melted into smiles. She saluted and thanked him. Meng Qianshan also breathed a sigh of relief and smiled.

Everyone was happy, but Jiang Suizhou's mouth tasted of bile.

He turned around, quickened his pace, and strode into the original owner's study.

Once he entered the study, he shut everyone out and forbade anyone from entering.

This afternoon, he brought out his academic skills in checking and analyzing historical materials and browsed through all the folders and letters in the original owner's study.

As expected, although the original body pretended to be an idle prince, he actually had private dealings with many ministers in the court.

However, because Pang Shao currently had sole authority over the court and had a lot of henchmen, it didn't matter even if he could see the original owner's painstaking work in the court. He only roped in a ragtag team, which was simply mediocre against Pang Shao.

It was probably for this reason that Pang Shao had not bothered to scheme against him.

In addition, Jiang Suizhou also dug up the two wives in his own harem from the account book.

One was called Xu Du, an ideal match that Jiang Suizhou met after he went south to Lin'an; the other was named Gu Changyun, a prostitute he bought from a brothel two years ago.

Xu Du was not favored, but had a good relationship with Gu Changyun; on the other hand, the original owner favored Gu Changyun very much. Every few days, he would go to Gu Changyun's room to rest. Each time he went in, he wouldn't let others follow.

Furthermore, there were many concubines in his house. He bought some of them himself, and some were sent by his associates.

However, they either died of illness or suffered punishment. In just a few years, only these two were left.

Jiang Suizhou frowned.

He did not expect that the original owner was such a brutal man. He knew there was a reason why the servants in the house were terrified of him.

The sun glided a bit to the middle of the sky and fell inch by inch. The sunset pierced through the window, sprinkling molten gold of warmth in the room.

Meng Qianshan knocked on the door and informed Jiang Suizhou that it was time for dinner.

Jiang Suizhou stored the letters away in his room, then left the study and got on the carriage that Meng Qianshan had prepared a while ago.

On the way to Madam Gu's courtyard, he had already figured out how to respond.

The original owner was gay, but he wasn't, and would not do anything to someone else's concubine —— despite that "someone else" now being himself.

The concubine surnamed Gu was from a brothel, so he must not have much power. Therefore, once Jiang Suizhou got there, he intended to let the other party complain tearfully. However, he would maintain a cold countenance, put on a look of annoyance from the crying, admonish him with a few sentences, and leave. Afterwhich, he would take this as a reason and pretend that he detested fighting in his harem and ignore the other party, then put the matter behind him.

He planned everything and made psychological preparations. He just had to wait for the other party to rush to cry.

He followed the original owner's example and dismissed his servants, but when he walked into Gu Changyun's courtyard and pushed the door open to his room, he did not expect to see such a scene.

Gu Changyun was reclining lazily on a couch in the inner room, holding his bandaged wrist in one hand and rubbing it slowly.

Xu Du was also there beside him.

Seeing Jiang Suizhou enter, Xu Du got up, clasped his fists and gave him a salute.

Madam Gu, who was rumored to be a vixen from the brothel, looked familiar but wasn't the least bit subservient. He got up and smiled. "Today, I suffered a lot to find an excuse to see Your Highness – that General Huo, he's really ruthless."

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Chapter 9.1

Behind the vast and exquisite garden, was the back residence of the palace. The large chic houses were divided into courtyards, where the concubines of the palace lived.

Jingwang's residence was originally the residence of an affluent and powerful gentry in Lin'an. The entire residence occupied an extremely large area and was overly luxurious and exquisite. The imperial court fled south, and the gentry were afraid of attracting attacks, so they forfeited a lot of properties. This family homestead was also handed over on a silver platter.

Since then, this place became Jingwang's residence.

Jingwang was not like that magnate, whose family lived under the same roof and thrived for generations. The huge residence was simply dissatisfying. Therefore, although the houses in the backyard were numerous, most of them were empty. They were so empty that after a long time, many houses were left unattended.

As night fell, a few remaining lamps in the corner were lit in an old and dilapidated courtyard.

The door of the room opened with a creak.

The maid carried a food container and strode in after entering the threshold. The main house was not spacious, and the objects inside have not been cleaned for a long time. Upon entering, dust would fly everywhere, causing one to choke.

The maid frowned in disgust and quickened her steps. She walked to the table in the room, and put the container of food down heavily on the table.

“The food is here. Please help yourself, Master.” Her tone was cold and icy, and the word “master” carried a bit of venom, which was quite harsh in the quiet of the night.

The person in the wheelchair in the room did not respond to her.

The maid had already noticed that this man was not only a cripple, but also a mute. As long as people didn’t touch him, he wouldn’t react to any bullying.

He was naturally the best punching bag.

The maid had only been in Jingwang’s mansion for a few months and finally got a chance to serve a master.

Although several people in the house were considered masters, the gap was huge. Madam Xu’s place, for instance, wasn’t an ideal place.

She has long been seeking ways and tried every means to serve Madam Gu in his courtyard, but she did not expect that she would be assigned to this disabled person.

What benefits could she gain by coming here? The cripple himself was living in a dilapidated house that leaked.

The maid had a stomach full of grievances, and when she saw his wheelchair, she felt even more unlucky.

Seeing that the cripple was silent as usual, she sneered and said, “You probably don’t know it yet. After what happened at noon today, Madam Gu’s maid went to His Highness’s courtyard to complain. Once His Highness heard the news, he immediately said that he would go to Madam Gu’s room tonight.”

Huo Wujiu didn’t move a muscle.

The maid’s voice turned a bit sharp: “Do you know what kind of person Madam Gu is? You hit his beloved. Do you think His Highness will let you go? When His Highness punishes you, we might even be implicated. I am

truly unlucky to be assigned to such a shabby courtyard: on my first day here, I ran into such a thing."

After saying that, she coldly snorted, turned around and stomped out.

"A mere cripple, yet you want to fight with others. You really overestimated yourself."

The door was heavily slammed shut.

Huo Wujiu slowly closed his eyes.

His forehead was burning badly at this moment, and he was already having a fever because of his wounds.

His mind gradually clouded with a layer of chaos, despite himself being sober.

He hid all emotions back into the depths of his eyes.

In those eyes, a savage beast was forcibly shut into a narrow cage by reason, scraped by the iron cage till it bled all over.

He had endured pain and humiliation since he was a child.

He knew that a defeated foe ought to be trampled upon at will; it was rightly so. He also knew that he had to stay in the green hills and lie on wood and taste gall. So long as he had one last breath, there would always be a day that blood would be paid in blood.

He knew that there was no hardship he couldn't endure and overcome, but he never realized that to kill a tiger, there wasn't really a need for a knife.

Just let him sustain some injuries, lock him up, and sprinkle a handful of flies on his injuries that couldn't be dispersed or avoided.

The tiger would then naturally die, little by little. No matter how strong it was, it wouldn't be able to fight back.

——

Jiang Suizhou looked at them blankly and saw Gu Changyun stepping forward and asking him to sit down. Then he asked, “Master, what did Pang Shao do in the courtroom today?”

Gu Changyun’s question rendered Jiang Suizhou dumbfounded.

He assumed many possibilities, but never considered that the vixen was not a vixen, and the ideal marriage was not an ideal marriage. These two people were actually the original owner’s staff who were kept in the house under the name of concubines.

For a time, many things became clearer.

It turned out that the original owner’s so-called “homosexuality” was nothing but a guise. It was a no-brainer. It must have been to deceive the emperor and Pang Shao and reduce their reservations against him. The so-called concubines who died because of his brutality and viciousness must have been spies that others sent to test him, and therefore died tragically at his hands.

Jiang Suizhou admired the original owner for a moment.

Bearing disgrace and a heavy burden, while meticulous planning…had he been the one who sat on the throne, the Jing Dynasty wouldn’t have perished so quickly.

He slowly sat down on the Taishi chair[1] in the middle of the room while digesting the huge amount of information that came out of nowhere.

In a moment, he deliberated his words and spoke briefly, “He asked me for the right to repair the ancestral hall through His Majesty’s mouth.”

After saying that, he picked up the cup of tea that Gu Changyun just poured for him on the table and took a sip.

He had forgotten to drink water when he was in the study and read through the information earlier. Now that he took a seat, he felt parched.

Jiang Suizhou took two sips of tea, but the room remained quiet. The two people did not speak.

Footnote:

[1] Taishi chair – a symbol of the master’s status and identity.

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Chapter 9.2

He put down his cup of tea and looked towards them.

Xu Du, who was sitting on the side, unhurriedly opened his mouth and asked, “Although the ancestral hall repair isn’t a big deal, several officials in the Ministry of Rites won it with difficulty…Now, Pang Shao took it away?”

He looked calm, and his expression was also bland, but in just a few words, he gave off the feeling of a spring breeze.

Jiang Suizhou could not help but relax a little. “His Majesty asked for it. There is no other way.”

Next to him, Gu Changyun spoke, “Since he has borrowed the mouth of His Majesty, it is indeed difficult for Your Highness to refuse. It’s just a pity that the money will fall into Pang Shao’s hands again.”

Xu Du said, “There is still a chance later on, so just wait. But the Ministry of Rites’ officials, can Your Highness appease them?”

Gu Changyun nodded. “Indeed. Those lords have done a lot of work for Your Highness this time. If we annoy them, your agreements with them recently will become a threat against you in their hands.”

After speaking, the two of them turned sideways and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

They were straightforward, clear and logical. It was easy to discern that all the information the original owner usually obtained was shared with them. These two people were extremely trustworthy to him.

But the premise was…They didn’t find out that another person swapped over Jingwang.

Hence, Jiang Suizhou was quite cautious. After taking down what they said, along with the names of those ministers discreetly, he nodded and said concisely, “I know. I’ve also advised Lord Qi today.”

The two nodded.

Then, Jiang Suizhou briefly told them about the rest of the memorials in the courtroom. Fortunately, the Huo Zhu was a consummate fatuous ruler and nothing useful was discussed during the early morning court session, so Jiang Suizhou didn’t have much trouble.

Both naturally discussed with him.

What they considered was what Pang Shao would do under this dynasty, and what chances they had to interfere and reap profits by the way. Jiang Suizhou gradually realized that these two people must be the original owner’s think tank. They would analyze and deduce for him, and then it was up to him to make the decision.

It was mainly because the original owner had a weak single power that his means in fighting against Pang Shao were not so glorious. —— For example, in the case of repairing the ancestral hall, the original owner’s intention was to also embezzle from the inside. The difference with Pang Shao was in whose hands the money would fall.

Jiang Suizhou understood him. After all, the imperial court has reached such a point. It was simply useless to blindly remain upright and clean.

Jiang Suizhou then listened carefully to the two’s discussion and wrote down the useful information for future use when fishing in troubled waters.

Time flew by. When they finished discussing things, half of the lamp oil was used up.

They stopped. Jiang Suizhou said he was somewhat thirsty and again picked up a cup of tea, drinking two sips of tea.

Then Gu Changyun spoke again.

“Master…how do you feel about Huo Wujiu?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou froze.

…What do you mean, feel? Don’t tell me you’re still competing with him for favor?

He looked at Gu Changyun. He wanted to say something but stopped and did not speak for a moment.

Then he saw Gu Changyun rubbing his wrist and puffed out a laugh.

“Master, don’t think too much. I have discussed with Xu Du today, and I think on Huo Wujiu’s side…There are still things that you must do yourself.”

Jiang Suizhou did not understand, so he inclined his head, signaling him to continue.

Xu Du and Gu Changyun exchanged glances.

Gu Changyun then expounded, “In the last couple of years, Pang Shao and His Majesty haven’t stopped planting spies on you. However, you’ve disposed of all those people, and none of them were left. Now, there are only two of us in the house, and you brought both of us in yourself… Therefore, when Pang Shao proposed the plan to His Majesty to give Huo Wujiu to you as a concubine, I think it must have been with the intention of testing you.”

Jiang Suizhou frowned: “You mean…”

Gu Changyun nodded. “His Majesty doesn’t care about it for the time being, but Pang Shao still has doubts about your homosexuality. The people he sent in before were all spies, but this time, Huo Wujiu is different…He is

neither His Majesty's nor Pang Shao's. He was born with outstanding looks, so Pang Shao must have sent someone to secretly spy to see if you…will still favor Huo Wujiu."

Jiang Suizhou: "…"

Ah, let me spoil Huo Wujiu to prove that I am a gay? Why don't you guys just cut off my head and hand it over to Huo Wujiu?

He immediately refused, "If I don't spoil Huo Wujiu, will that prove that my homosexuality is fake? That's an inappropriate move."

But Xu Du, who has been silent, seconded.

He said, "But if you pamper him several times, that can prove that you're gay — Otherwise, I think it will not be long before Pang Shao's party will still send people in. If you kill anyone who enters one by one…I think it won't be long before it's exposed."

Gu Changyun nodded, "We discussed and felt that this is the most appropriate way to go. Your Highness does not need to worry. Just spend more nights at Huo Wujiu's place during this period of time."

They implied that it didn't matter whether he did or didn't do something to him.

It was enough to physically let Pang Shao know that he, Jiang Suizhou, could bear to sleep with even the most loathsome men as long as they were good looking.

Xu Du then added, "Today is quite good. Changyun has just clashed with Huo Wujiu, and it makes sense for you to visit him today."

For a time, two pairs of extremely serious eyes looked at Jiang Suizhou one after another.

Jiang Suizhou looked at them and fell into silence.

He had made a lot of preparations, just so he could not sleep with the original master’s concubines.

It never occurred to him that the original owner’s concubines would look at him eagerly and ask him to sleep with Huo Wujiu.

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Chapter 10.1

The door of the room opened and then closed again.

Jiang Suizhou left.

Gu Changyun walked back slowly to Xu Du's side and sat down, picking up his own cup of tea.

"It's still early. Shall we play a game of chess and then go back?" He suggested lazily, blowing on the floating leaves on the water.

Xu Du, however, made no sound.

Gu Changyun raised his eyes and saw that Xu Du was sizing him up.

They had worked together for a long time, and with a single look, Gu Changyun understood what he was thinking.

He held his tea and let out a snort of laughter.

Xu Du opened his mouth and said, "You can see it too." It wasn't a question, but a statement.

That, although clearly the King looked like the King, he was in no way the King.

Both of their lives were tethered to His Highness, so His Highness never worried that they would defect, let alone had to pretend in front of them… He had never treated the two of them so calmly.

Especially when Pang Shao snatched away what was his, he was too calm.

As for Huo Wujiu…

His Majesty bestowed their marriage through a decree, so His Highness had loathed him before even seeing him. His Highness transferred all his hatred for Pang Shao and His Majesty to Huo Wujiu, wishing to let Huo Wujiu die a violent death in his residence like those scouts, and let people drag him to a mass grave.

After all, to His Highness, Huo Wujiu was a symbol of the emperor's wanton humiliation of him. A day that Huo Wujiu stayed in his house meant a day he was trampled under the feet of the good-for-nothing he had always despised.

Therefore, at a glance, Xu Du saw through Gu Changyun's scrutiny with his proposal just now.

Gu Changyun put down his cup of tea.

"What do I see? The one who came just now, isn't he the King?"

He spoke breezily. While speaking, he took out a chessboard and two chess baskets, one black and one white, from under the table where he sat, and placed one of them in Xu Du's hand.

"No matter what, the lives of my whole family are in His Highness's hands." Gu Changyun drawled as he slowly and orderly moved the chess pieces.

"As long as we obey the King's orders, we don't have to worry about anything else, right?"

Saying that, he dropped a piece on the chessboard and raised his eyes at Xu Du.

Flickers of excitement shimmered in those exquisite and delicate eyes, that were as cold as a bottomless abyss.

——

Those two lulled Jiang Suizhou. After weighing the pros and cons, he still went to Huo Wujiu's residence.

He had killed those previous spies sent in as concubines, but the more of them he killed, the more suspicious he'd become. What was more, he was a modern man and couldn't send someone to kill another.

This time…he could only rely on Huo Wujiu.

Along the way, Jiang Suizhou was chagrined.

He regretted speaking too harshly.

Last night, he had warned Huo Wujiu not to be an eyesore, yet today, he himself rushed to his residence to be an eyesore.

Before he even arrived at Huo Wujiu's residence, he had already felt embarrassed for himself.

The palanquin traveled for a long time before it finally arrived at a dimly lit courtyard.

Jiang Suizhou sat in the palanquin and only glanced at it briefly before withdrawing his gaze.

Next to the courtyard, it was pitch black with some faint lights in the distance. That must be the house where the servants lived.

But unexpectedly, the palanquin stopped in front of this courtyard gate.

Jiang Suizhou looked askance at Meng Qianshan, who was beaming at him from the side. Meng Qianshab stepped forward and tried to help him get out of the palanquin.

As Jiang Suizhou walked down, he frowned and asked, "Here?"

Meng Qianshan nodded. "We're here! This is the courtyard that Your Highness has arranged for Madam Huo. Did you forget?"

Jiang Suizhou stood still and looked up.

From a distance, this courtyard and the surrounding houses were in harmony. He couldn't see anything special.

But when he stood closer, he could see that the courtyard was barren. There were weeds everywhere and several big trees that had never been pruned looked like they were baring fangs and claws in the yard. The ground was covered with a layer of leaves that should have fallen in the autumn of last year.

Through the dim light coming from the window, he could vaguely see the broken window panes and window paper, rustling and trembling under the breeze.

…This place was uninhabitable!

King Jing had driven Huo Wujiu to the corner of the palace and gave him such a dilapidated house to live in. A quick glance around and it was clear that the original owner never wanted Huo Wujiu to appear in front of him for the rest of his life. He even deliberately made things difficult for Huo Wujiu, so that he would live a bitter life in the King's residence.

The original owner was struggling in Southern Jing; he was probably limited to seizing power from the Emperor and Pang Shao. For him, Huo Wujiu was a traitor and an enemy he would never consider to win over.

——How could he have known what Huo Wujiu would do three years later?

Jiang Suizhou fell into a complicated mood for a while and couldn't help but thank his two "concubines" in his heart.

If not for today's timely arrival, he probably would have had to shoulder the original owner's blame again and be a credit on Huo Wujiu's account.

He sighed inwardly, and grunted, "I mentioned it offhand. I can't remember."

After speaking, he lifted his feet and walked towards the courtyard.

Next to him, Meng Qianshan clicked his tongue in wonder.

How could he not remember? A few days ago, when he asked His Highness where Madam Huo would live, His Highness’s eyes were frighteningly cold. He specifically said to throw Huo Wujiu a little further away and never let him see him.

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Chapter 10.2

But…

Thinking about His Highness's appearance in the morning, Meng Qianshan also worked it out.

His Highness used to hate Madam Huo because he hasn't seen Madam Hou's face yet.

Now that His Highness and Madam Huo spent the night, his attitude changed this morning. Faced with such ardent love, the disgust of before naturally did not count…

Meng Qianshan jogged all the way and followed behind Jiang Suizhou.

Not only was this courtyard on low terrain, but all the used water from the residence was also dumped here. As soon as Jiang Suizhou entered the yard, he felt damp and cold. Even the wind blowing on his body was several degrees lower.

…Truth be told, this sickly body is just too sensitive.

He went straight to the room in the middle but found no one in the corridor.

Before he could speak, Meng Qianshan beat him to it. He raised his voice and said, "Where have all the people in this courtyard gone?"

A few moments later, two maids scurried out from the side room, looking like they had already hit the sack.

As soon as they saw them, both showed surprise and fear on their faces. They quickly stepped forward and knelt down in front of Jiang Suizhou:

“…Your Highness!”

Jiang Suizhou’s brow furrowed.

Although he was still unaccustomed to the ancient concept of masters and servants, he knew that one should do their job when paid wages. On top of that, one shouldn’t bully their employer.

They were obviously bullying Huo Wujiu.

Beside him, Meng Qianshan caught a glimpse of his reaction and sternly rebuked, “Why is there not even a night watch at the door? So, did you just leave your master to sleep like this? Did you come here to serve the Madam or to be the master yourself?”

The two maids did not dare to raise their heads at all, kowtowing one after the other to admit their mistakes.

Jiang Suizhou raised his hand and rubbed his temples.

It was apparent that the original owner’s death in the unofficial history was not only because of his own actions, but also because everyone in his house, from top to bottom, flattered the superior and trampled on the lowly. He insistently formed a deep-rooted enmity with Huo Wujiu that solidified his end.

He waved his hand and said indifferently, “Handle it.” Then he turned and went into the room.

Meng Qianshan agreed and ordered, “Men, drag them both away and give them a beating. Tomorrow, send them back to the slave trader along with their deeds of sale and sell them wherever!”

The two maids cried for mercy but were dragged far away.

However, Jiang Suizhou couldn’t care less about them.

As soon as he entered the room, he choked and coughed violently.

There was dust everywhere, filling the air. After just one breath, Jiang Suizhou felt like his fragile lungs had been hit hard. He was coughing so hard that he couldn’t distinguish between the north and the south, and tears welled up in his eyes.

The servants who followed behind were terrified. They entered in a flurry, helping to pour tea. But there wasn’t even a place to sit in the room, and the pot on the table only contained half a pot of cold water.

Everyone rushed around. Amidst the chaos, Jiang Suizhou vaguely heard the sound of a wheelchair, low and mute, which was instantly drowned in the sound of people.

Someone helped him to sit at the side. After coughing for a long time, he downed the hot tea that people had taken the trouble to find, suppressed it, and barely stopped coughing.

Only then did he open his teary eyes and saw Huo Wujiu, who was sitting diagonally in front of Jiang Suizhou looking suspiciously at him.

His dark eyes were like whirlpools.

Jiang Suizhou involuntarily coughed a few more times, and the physiological tears in his eyes fell in response.

As the tears fell, Jiang Suizhou also closely beheld Huo Wujiu.

He wasn’t sure if it was his illusion, but Huo Wujiu’s dark eyes seemed to be covered in a layer of fog.

But the next moment, those eyes moved away and did not look at him again.

Jiang Suizhou was naturally unaware of how pitiful he appeared in the eyes of others.

A cold and beautiful sickly man with reddened eyes, teary eyelashes, and a heavy cloak wrapped around him; when someone took in his tearful appearance, why did he feel like he was somewhat inviting a ravaging?

Jiang Suizhou was completely oblivious. When he finished coughing, he gathered the cloak that Meng Qianshan had just wrapped around him, sat up straight and said indifferently, “Meng Qianshan, is this the arrangement you said you had made?”

The cough sobered him up. He knew that he had to shift the blame first, so that he could logically take charge and give Huo Wujiu a new residence.

Hearing this, Meng Qianshan trembled and guiltily pleaded, “It’s all my negligence – it’s all my negligence! Tomorrow…um, no, immediately! I’ll immediately let people tidy up another courtyard and have Madam Huo move there!”

Jiang Suizhou gave a hum of approval and took another sip of tea.

He thought to himself; it would be best if Huo Wujiu was moved closer to him. After all, he had just taken the advice of those two minions and had to frequent Huo Wujiu’s place in the coming days…

He drank his tea with a start.

Didn’t the Anyin Hall where he lived have a lot of spare rooms?

Not only could he see Huo Wujiu daily and prevent others from secretly bullying him, but he would also have a way to sneak back to sleep in his own room. Once this reached the Emperor and Pang Shao’s ears, his goal would be achieved…What better way to have the best of both worlds than this?!

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes all but lit up.

He put down his teacup and spoke gently.

“There’s no need to clean up another courtyard,” he instructed, “Move him directly to my place.”

For a spell, the servants around him froze when they heard this command.

But Jiang Suizhou remained motionless.

Anyway, as the head of his own house, he needn’t explain his decisions to them. He just needed to pretend to be unpredictable.

However…

He noticed under the dim light that Huo Wujiu’s face looked somewhat abnormal.

He wasn’t even listening to what Jiang Suizhou was saying. One of his arms was resting on the armrest of his wheelchair, while the other hand was laboriously supporting his drooping head.

…*Was he sick?*

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Chapter 11.1

Meng Qianshan did not succeed in helping Madam Huo move courtyards today.

Once his master found out that Madam Huo was not quite right and did not respond after calling out to him twice, Meng Qianshan raced all the way back and personally went to look for the mansion doctor.

Jiang Suizhou, who remained in the room, ordered the rest of the servants to push Huo Wujiu to the inner room and help him lie down on the bed first.

Huo Wujiu seemed to be running a fever, a severe fever. Although he was still sitting, his reaction was much slower.

He reacted only when someone tried to help him.

The servant was just about to touch his leg when he reflexively raised his hand and blocked the man.

That servant was overwhelmed with astonishment. Then Huo Wujiu looked down and said hoarsely, “I’ll do it myself.”

Calm but resolute. The servant hurriedly looked at Jiang Suizhou and waited for the King’s own order. However, he found that Jiang Suizhou, who was sitting beside him, didn’t look at him and instead fixed his gaze on Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu didn’t pay attention to them. Instead, he braced his hands on the armrests. Although he moved skillfully, it was obvious that he was weak at this time and his movements were somewhat sluggish.

He slowly propped himself up and moved to the bed.

After sitting on the bed, he did not lie down, but propped himself up with the bedpost.

He sat straight and still.

Although Huo Wujiu said nothing, Jiang Suizhou saw some innate pride in his movements.

Jiang Suizhou’s gaze paused and suddenly he couldn’t help but think of Huo Wujiu from the history books.

He was born in Yangguan as the son of the Marquis of Dingbei of the Jing Dynasty. He learned equestrian and archery at the age of six, and hunted tigers at the age of ten. He turned thirteen in the 20th year of Southern Jing, when the Emperor of Jing forced his father to rebel and rise against Southern Jing. In the 23rd year of Southern Jing, his father died in the Battle of Xunyang. His uncle who joined his father in the uprising was also besieged and surrounded by the army.

It was he who took over the commander-in-chief banner in the rebel army and rescued his uncle from the sieg. He won against his stronger enemy and became famous from one battle. Afterward, he defended his uncle and became the commander of the Liang army step by step.

Prior to his capture, he had not lost a single battle and was an irresistible power. In just four years, he invaded Yecheng and drove the Emperor of Jing across the Yangtze River, from which the Liang dynasty divided the river and ruled.

He was a finely dressed young general, riding on a dashing horse. Even if historians wrote about him impartially, they couldn’t deny his legendary character.

He was a hero that Jiang Suizhou had studied countless times through yellowing historical materials, thousands of years apart.

Huo Wujiu was right to be a proud man.

Jiang Suizhou suddenly understood why the emperor broke Huo Wujiu's legs.

This seemed to be the only way to make him kneel down.

Jiang Suizhou fell into a trance and didn't notice that he was staring at Huo Wujiu the entire time. He also didn't notice that even though Huo Wujiu was already burnt out, he was still acutely aware of Jiang Suizhou's eyes and frowned slightly, staring right back at him.

By the time Jiang Suizhou came to his senses, Huo Wujiu's eyes had already turned hostile.

Jiang Suizhou read his eyes at a glance.

Huo Wujiu seemed to be asking him wordlessly: *Why don't you get lost?*

Jiang Suizhou: "…"

The rare bit of emotion that rose in his heart dissipated cleanly.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze without giving away what he intended to hide. He masked his guilty conscience with coldness, gathered his cloak with one hand while walking to the bedside, and looked condescendingly at Huo Wujiu from above.

"Why hasn't the mansion doctor arrived yet?" He coldly asked the servants nearby.

The maids and servants around all knew that His Highness had a terrible temper and was difficult to serve, so they didn't dare to say a word. Silence reigned in the room for a while.

Nonetheless, only Jiang Suizhou knew that he felt quite embarrassed under Huo Wujiu's gaze. He was a paper tiger in a hasty search for a remedy to redeem himself.

From the corner of his eye, he looked at Huo Wujiu, but the man had long since lowered his eyes and wasn't looking at him.

…Even in sickness, you're extraordinarily unpleasant.

Fortunately, Meng Qianshan came right on time, gasping for breath with the mansion doctor.

It was still Doctor Zhou.

As soon as he entered the room, he saw His Highness standing cold as ice by the bed, as if confronting Huo Wujiu who was seated there. When His Highness saw him enter, he inclined his head slightly, and a pair of icy eyes shot towards him.

Doctor Zhou has always been timid, so he immediately lowered his head, not daring to take another look.

"Come and check him out." He heard the King's cold command.

"Look at how sick he is. Don't let him die in my mansion."

That voice sounded so nice, the tone arrogant and gentle, but with some faintly audible fine wheezing. From the sound of it, he was in bad health and was out of breath midway.

The doctor hurriedly responded and came forward with his eyes downcast, just in time to see Huo Wujiu sitting on the bed, subtly lifting his eyelids and giving the King a meaningful glance.

He was about to withdraw his gaze, yet as if something had attracted him, his gaze paused and fell on the King again.

Doctor Zhou was about to take another look when his eyes suddenly collided with a cold, hostile and gloomy gaze.

Huo Wujiu had caught him peering.

Those eyes were evidently feeble and cloudy, but they still scared Doctor Zhou. He quickly dropped his gaze, walked over to Huo Wujiu's bed, put down his medical kit, and began to diagnose him.

Jiang Suizhou sat back again.

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Chapter 11.2

Meng Qianshan stood on his side, skillfully filling a pot with fresh, hot tea. He placed it beside him and asked carefully, “Where is Your Highness staying tonight?”

With Madam Huo’s appearance today, he definitely could not serve His Highness in bed. Moreover, he had a fever, and His Highness was weak. What if he passed his illness to His Highness?

Jiang Suizhou watched Doctor Zhou and did not speak for a while.

Meng Qianshan sensed that His Highness wasn’t in the mood to speak, so he also quietly waited at his side and asked no further.

A moment later, Doctor Zhou turned around and knelt in front of Jiang Suizhou.

“Your Highness, Madam Huo is suffering from a high fever due to wound inflammation…” He added hurriedly, “Madam Huo endured it, but he has been burning up for some time. His injuries are quite serious, so if this continues, I’m afraid it will endanger his life!”

Jiang Suizhou frowned, “It’s that serious?”

Doctor Zhoufu nodded, “I’ll immediately boil some medicine and change his bandages later. As long as his fever subsides in time, it won’t be a big problem.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded. “Tell Meng Qianshan to boil the medicine, while you change the bandages for him now.”

Doctor Zhou agreed promptly.

Jiang Suizhou propped one hand on his cheek, turned his head sideways and looked at Huo Wujiu, who was sitting on the edge of the bed.

Although Huo Wujiu was sitting upright, he was already dizzy from the fever. His eyes that were glaring at everyone just now were also shut heavily.

Doctor Zhou carefully unwrapped his bandages to clean his wounds. Blood had soaked the gauze, making it stuck to the flesh. Even when he carefully unwrapped the gauze, the wounds were still inevitably torn.

Huo Wujiu's eyes were closed, but his brow was furrowed. He pursed his lips and still restrained himself from gasping even in his muddled state. Only the trembling of his brow as his bandages were ripped open revealed that he was in pain.

Jiang Suizhou suddenly remembered something.

When he was a child and still living in his father's house, his brother, born from a younger woman he didn't know, once pushed him down the stairs and caused him to twist his ankle. His mother was in a bad mood those days and always crying, so he did not dare to let her know. He limped back to his room and endured the pain all night.

The feeling of enduring the pain alone was so torturous that no amount of reading could distract him from it.

But for Huo Wujiu, it seemed to have become a habit engraved in his bones.

Jiang Suzhou couldn't resist staring at Huo Wujiu's body, unable to extricate his eyes for a second.

It was covered in crisscross injuries, fresh, bloody, and very deep.

…It must hurt like hell.

He sat there quietly, watching Doctor Zhou clean Huo Wujiu's wounds, rewrap them in gauze, and help him lie down.

Doctor Zhou then reported to Jiang Suizhou. He knelt once more, and said, “Your Highness, his bandages have been changed. Later on, just give Madam the medicine and sponge him with cold towels to cool him down. Once his fever subsides, there’ll be no serious problem.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded and raised his hand, signaling him to go and do it himself.

Doctor Zhou went to prepare a handkerchief and placed it on Huo Wujiu’s forehead.

Not long after, Meng Qianshan came back with the medicine.

He handed the medicine to the doctor and returned to Jiang Suizhou’s side, bowing down and asking, “Your Highness, it’s getting late. Why don’t you go back to Anyin Hall and rest for now?”

Seeing that Jiang Suizhou was staring at Huo Wujiu, he did not forget to add, “If you are not at ease, I will leave some more people here to keep watch.”

He naturally knew that Huo Wujiu would not burn to death, and that there was nothing to worry about.

However, he could not help but think of the original Huo Wujiu.

Back then, there must have been no one to bandage him or change his dressing. To survive such a high fever like this one, it was a wonder how many days and nights he burned up. He had forcibly dragged his life back from Yama’s hands.

Having experienced what it was like to exercise patience in pain alone, Jiang Suizhou suddenly felt reluctant to leave.

A few moments later, he ordered lightly, “Go find a book for me.”

Meng Qianshan was stunned. He forged ahead and replied without thought, “Is Your Highness not going to leave…?”

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and looked at him, forcing the second half of Meng Qianshan's words back into his mouth.

Meng Qianshan could only nod repeatedly and go find him a book.

——

When Huo Wujiu woke up, it was already late at night.

He opened his eyes in the dark, feeling something on his forehead. He raised his hand and pulled it off, and saw that it was a damp, cool handkerchief.

He frowned.

It seemed that he has been feverish since the afternoon today. This was nothing unusual. He was wounded so many times on the battlefield and occasionally suffered fevers. A good night's sleep was all it took.

In the evening, King Jing seemed to have visited, and before he figured what the latter was going to do, Huo Wujiu had fainted from the fever.

Huo Wujiu lifted his hand and touched his forehead.

A cool patch.

He was fully sober at this point, but an extremely surreal feeling arose deep within him.

He was a prisoner of war captured by the enemy, a tool sent to King Jing's residence to humiliate him. However, he was now lying peacefully on a bed. His wounds were treated and now clean and fresh; his forehead was covered with a cool handkerchief; and the air was filled with a faint smell of medicine.

It was distinctly bitter, yet calming and soothing.

He was born at the border where life was gruelling. He was extremely resistant to any fall, and had never been so cared for in his life.

He turned his head sideways and saw a man sitting in the dim light.

The man was asleep, holding a book in one hand on his lap while supporting the side of his head with the other. His eyelashes were long, covering a pair of eyes that were always cold and arrogant.

The light shone on his side profile, coating him with a soft glow.

Huo Wujiu realized that he was guarding him.

His breathing hitched uncontrollably.

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Chapter 12.1

Jiang Suizhou did not sleep well again tonight.

He was sleepy from reading, not knowing when he fell asleep, and Meng Qianshan also gave him a blanket to prevent him from catching a fever.

But when he opened his eyes, he still felt dizzy and lightheaded, especially because the couch was extremely hard. It was very uncomfortable after sitting for a long period of time. He sat there all night, making his body sore all over.

Jiang Suizhou felt somewhat infuriated.

How did the original owner arrange such a room for Huo Wujiu? With such simple furniture, did he not consider that Huo Wujiu would sleep on the sofa here one day?

He sat up and found that the sky was getting brighter. The aroma of food drifted in. It should be Meng Qianshan directing the people to prepare breakfast.

Jiang Suizhou stood up and glanced at the bed.

It was empty. Where was Huo Wujiu?

Jiang Suizhou had just woken up and was still a bit confused, so he froze and looked around.

He was caught off guard when his gaze collided with a pair of cool, dark eyes.

Jiang Suizhou was startled to see Huo Wujiu sitting by the window in the faint daylight. He was holding the book Jiang Suizhou had read halfway last night, flipping through it at random.

Just by looking at his movements with the book, it was evident that Huo Wujiu wasn't a man who could read at all.

He raised his eyes to look at Jiang Suizhou, his gaze cold and his face expressionless.

His eyes looked like they could see right through people.

Jiang Suizhou suddenly felt somewhat embarrassed. He didn't do anything, but for some reason, he felt a little guilty.

…Perhaps because of his choice to keep watch all night, his persona was more or less in ruins.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze as if nothing had happened and coldly called out, "Meng Qianshan?"

When Meng Qianshan who was outside heard his call, he trotted inside to wait upon Jiang Suizhou.

Meng Qianshan had always been garrulous. As long as Jiang Suizhou didn't interrupt him, he could talk like nobody's business for hours on end. Jiang Suizhou happened to be embarrassed, so he let him nag. Afterward, as if Huo Wujiu was nonexistent, Jiang Suizhou finished breakfast, then fled.

Today, there was no grand court assembly, so he could go to the office.

Before leaving, he remembered to remind Meng Qianshan, "Don't forget to move Madam Huo into my courtyard."

Meng Qianshan repeatedly assured him.

After Jiang Suizhou left, Meng Qianshan returned to Huo Wujiu's courtyard, bringing some people with him.

The courtyard was remote and dilapidated, and Huo Wujiu didn’t bring anything with him. Furthermore, he only stayed there for one night, so there was really nothing to move.

However, Madam Huo’s status obviously wasn’t the same as when he first entered the mansion. It would be negligent to just bring him to the King’s courtyard, right?

So, Meng Qianshan served Huo Wujiu breakfast with great care. After Huo Wujiu had eaten his fill, he smiled so much that he couldn’t see his lips and asked, “Madam Huo, is there anything else you want to buy? I’ll have someone fetch it.”

Huo Wujiu didn’t speak.

This servant was noisy and always currying favor, a bit of an eyesore.

Even more so because Meng Qianshan already regarded Huo Wujiu as a favored concubine, making him sick.

Meng Qianshan was completely oblivious. Hearing no response from Huo Wujiu, he made arrangements by himself. “Robes for all seasons must be made. I’ll go and invite the tailors in a little while. And Madam’s wheelchair, I’ll also find a carpenter to build a new one, all right? As for the servants who’ll attend to you…”

He met a pair of dark eyes.

Seeing that Huo Wujiu was looking at him, Meng Qianshan hurriedly bowed and stepped forward, only assuming he had something to order: “Madam?”

However, Huo Wujiu only gave him a faint glance with eyes as cold as a bottomless pool, a glance that chilled his heart and lungs.

“I don’t need anything,” he said coldly. “You, just get away.”

Meng Qianshan choked, and his enthusiasm was doused with cold water.

He fled in embarrassment.

…I never thought that Master would like someone as fierce and unreasonable as him.

He was too difficult to serve.

——

Although there was no grand court session, Jiang Suizhou had to go to the government office every day, but the Ministry of rites was more leisurely than other places. In addition, his job was sinecure, so he had nothing to do all day long.

On top of that, his boss, Ji You, was a good old chap.

From the records about this man in history books alone, it was clear that he was an idle official averse to trickery and was only fond of the four forms of poetry. Although the late emperor appointed him Number One Scholar, he was always a lukewarm official and spent his time writing beautiful poetry.

Ji You wasn’t at all close to Jui Suizhou, and at first glance, wasn’t in their camp, but nor was he hard on him. Even seeing that he looked unwell, Ji You said with a smile that there was nothing important for the day, and that Jiang Suizhou could go home earlier to rest.

Jiang Suizhou breathed a sigh of relief.

For him, whether it was the imperial court, or his own harem, the water was a little too deep, so he had to always be alert and vigilant.

On the contrary, working his shift at the government office was a rare breather.

For the first time, he took a good rest in the government office with the mentality of a middle-aged man who didn’t want to face the family pressure after work and hid in the car to smoke for a long time before going upstairs.

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Chapter 12.2

There was no emperor or Pang Shao, no torched-eyed servants, and no Huo Wujiu. He felt that the air in the Ministry of Rites was very fresh.

So much so that he was in a very good mood. When it was time to leave, he stopped to exchange pleasantries with Ji You when passing by his table.

“Lord Ji, what are you looking at?” He looked at the book in Ji You’s hand and asked.

Ji You looked up and saw that it was Jiang Suizhou. Ji You smiled and passed the book over to him: “It’s just some unofficial history without basis. It’s just to kill time.”

Jiang Suizhou took the book and flipped through it roughly, and indeed he was right.

Not only was it unofficial history, but it was also extremely boldly written unofficial history. It was almost like a written script with the same surname and name of the former emperor.

Jiang Suizhou flashed a bland smile, handed the book back to Ji You, and said with a smile, “The content is interesting.”

Ji You smiled and raised his eyebrows in surprise: “Is Your Highness also interested in this?”

The literati in this world have always been more sanctimonious. History books written in biographical style were orthodox, so privately compiled history like this with flourishing imagination was for the commoner’s amusement. The ordinary literati and aristocrats scorned them.

Jiang Suizhou shook his head.

He muttered inwardly: *Of course I'm not interested in unofficial history, but you wouldn't believe me even if I told you. I'm standing here and talking to you because I'm currently suffering for looking down on unofficial history.*

…Of course, you yourself may be living in unofficial history.

These kinds of words could only be said to himself and naturally couldn't be voiced out. Jiang Suizhou smiled gently and said, "I'm not interested. But history books are always written by people, and the later generations will comment on them, so who knows who is telling the truth and who is telling lies?"

He saw Ji You's eyes light up when he heard his words. His eyes twinkled with a glow of seeing a confidant.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly nodded to him in farewell, and then turned around and left.

——

Jiang Suizhou thought he couldn't afford such a high opinion from the Minister. After all, he could say such things, all thanks to a student who pitted him into an unofficial history.

Jiang Suizhou left the Ministry of Rites, got into the carriage, and returned to the King Jing Mansion.

Once he entered Anyin Hall, he saw people coming and going. Meng Qianshan happened to send two tailors out with cloth in their arms. Seeing that Jiang Suizhou had returned home, Meng Qianshan quickly welcomed him.

"Your Highness!" Meng Qianshan approached him grinning from ear to ear. "I've already brought Madam Huo here for you, and I've just asked the tailors to sew clothes for him. Tomorrow, the craftsman will come. I think his wheelchair is shoddy, so it should be replaced."

Jiang Suizhou looked at him with some confusion.

…I haven't said anything yet. Why is this kid so enthusiastic about Huo Wujiu?

But Meng Qianshan's eyes sparkled at him, as if waiting for his praise.

Jiang Suizhou paused: "…Hmm, not bad."

Meng Qianshan was instantly happy.

Jiang Suizhou felt blindsided by his silliness. He turned around and walked towards his room.

He walked at a relaxed pace as he tugged off his cloak that was in the way. Just as he stepped into the threshold, he suddenly remembered something. He was about to turn around to ask which room Huo Wujiu had been assigned to, when the man himself entered into his vision.

The man was sitting in a wheelchair surrounded by elegance and luxury, which made him seem particularly out of place.

Jiang Suizhou stopped undressing.

…Huo Wujiu.

How could Huo Wujiu be in his room?!

He froze in place, and after a moment, abruptly turned around and stormed off.

He bumped into an ambiguous and joyful Meng Qianshan. His face was brimming with reserved smiles, waiting for his compliments.

Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth.

…Praise you? I wish I could beat you up.

“Master?” Seeing Jiang Suizhou staring at him, Meng Qianshan smiled, waiting for him to speak.

Jiang Suizhou paused for a moment and whispered, “…Is this what you arranged?”

Meng Qianshan froze, and then it dawned on him.

“Ah, yes! Look at me, I forgot. Madam Huo came here, but there is no one to serve him yet!” He said. “I expelled the two maids from the mansion who were originally arranged for him. Currently, there’s only a young manservant left, but he seems to be honest. Your Highness, you see…”

Meng Qianshan halted there, waiting for Jiang Suizhou’s instructions.

Jiang Suizhou was livid.

Who asked you this! I am asking you why Huo Wujiu is living in my room!

Is it possible that no other place is habitable in such a huge courtyard?!

When the words reached his mouth, he moved his lips, but no words came out.

The door was wide open, and Huo Wujiu was inside, so he could definitely hear whatever he would say.

If Jiang Suizhou brought him here and then kicked him out, wouldn’t he offend him again?

…I originally made this decision thinking that it could reduce the difficulty a little, but I didn’t expect this foolish Meng Qianshan to lift it to a hellish level.

Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth, glared fiercely at Meng Qianshan, and swallowed the words at the edge of his mouth.

“There’s one left?” He picked up where Meng Qianshan left off and said, “Where is he? I want to go see him.”

Meng Qianshan smiled and hurriedly led him down the steps.

The people in the courtyard were busy, and the manservant was moving things with others. Beads of sweat reflecting the light in the sun dripped down his forehead from over exertion.

When he saw Jiang Suizhou coming, he hurriedly put down his things and bowed to him.

Jiang Suizhou stopped in his tracks and remembered something else.

He surmised that the reason Huo Wujiu was able to escape from here after three years was definitely because an insider was coordinating with the outside. However, the original owner would have never provided him with this opportunity, which was why it dragged on for three full years.

But…what if Jiang Suizhou helped him?

Wouldn't that be a big favor to him and save himself from having to deal with Pang Shao's group for another two years?

He pondered for a moment and said to the young manservant, "Come with me."

This was to give him some private instructions.

The manservant hurriedly followed, and Meng Qianshan had the good sense to stay where he was.

Unbeknownst to everyone, a pair of pitch-black eyes fell on Jiang Suizhou's back through the gap in the window pane.

He watched as Jiang Suizhou sought out his sidekick and took him to the side to talk alone.

As a King, what could he say to a young manservant?

It was definitely to ask him to do something. Huo Wujiu was well aware that the servant, apart from spying on him, couldn't do anything else.

Why exactly did he suddenly move him to his residence?…The answer seemed self-explanatory.

He was in the most heavily guarded place in the King's residence.

As for why he was living in the main house…the look of surprise in King Jing's eyes alone when he came in just now told him that his men had made the wrong arrangements.

Huo Wujiu prided himself on his calmness, never letting petty gains affect his reason, let alone losing judgment because his opponent was showing him a bit of goodwill.

His face was expressionless and his gaze cold and bland, as he quietly watched the man's every move outside the window.

He rested his hand on his wheelchair, and his fingertips tapped on the armrest twice with some annoyance.

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Chapter 13.1

Jiang Suizhou called the manservant aside, scanned the empty surroundings, then spoke.

“What’s your name?” He asked.

The manservant hurriedly wiped the sweat from his forehead and said, “Your Highness, my name is Sun Yuan.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded and then simply gave him a few instructions.

It was nothing more than telling him to serve carefully and not to make any mistakes.

The manservant appeared honest and timid. While listening to him, he kept squeezing the corners of his coat.

Jiang Suizhou scrutinized his every move.

Such a simple and honest man was quite suitable.

After a pause, Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth and asked, “Since yesterday when you served Madam Huo’s side, did anyone ever ask you to bring anything to him?”

Sun Yuan was stunned, then a look of fright took over his face as he waved his hands repeatedly.

“N-No!”

That meant yes.

Jiang Suizhou took everything under consideration and realized it. Although Huo Wujiu was a person of the Northern Liang, his father was a general of the Southern Jing. Some people in the court, more or less, dealt with him, so it wasn't surprising if there were one or two secretly making moves.

Jiang Suizhou nodded: "Even if there is, I will not punish you."

Sun Yuan said in a panic: "Your Highness, someone asked me to bring a letter, but I refused!"

Jiang Suizhou tried his best to put on a pleasant look, and said lightly, "So there is?"

Sun Yuan was so scared that his legs went weak.

He knew it. His Highness must have a purpose for suddenly finding him! Who in the world didn't know who Madam Huo was originally, so how could he dare to correspond with outsiders on his behalf? But unexpectedly, His Highness still guessed. Hence, whether he helped deliver the letter or not, he must be silenced…

The calmer the His Highness's voice was, the more he felt that something terrible was about to happen, which made his legs soften.

"Yes, there is…but I-I will never…"

"The next time someone sends a letter, you give it to Madam Huo. You don't have to report it," Jiang Suizhou said.

After all, Huo Wujiu was not stupid. If a letter was so smoothly delivered to him, not to mention in Jiang Suizhou's courtyard, someone must have deliberately done it. Huo Wujiu definitely would be suspicious.

Sun Yuan, who was halfway through his speech, was dumbfounded.

"I will never…huh?" He couldn't believe his ears.

Jiang Suizhou paused and restored that icy serious look.

“Just do as you’re told and don’t tell anyone,” he returned.

“You should know what happens…if you ever tip anyone off.”

——

After intimidating Sun Yuan a bit, Jiang Suizhou walked away with his hands behind his back.

The mess in his room was all Meng Qianshan’s foolish doing. Jiang Suizhou took a glance at the room and felt a headache. The thought of Huo Wujiu sitting in the room made him reluctant to go back.

He promptly decided to pass by the door of the room without entering and go to hide in the study for a while.

With that in mind, he calmly walked up the steps, then went around the corridor toward the study.

But at that moment, he caught a glimpse of Huo Wujiu in the room out of the corner of his eye.

He was the most out of place amidst the lively busy room, sitting in a wheelchair in the corner as silent as a grave.

He was born beautiful, but his eyes were a bit fierce. Every time he looked at people, he always frightened them in a snap.

But this time, he dropped his eyes pensively. His long eyelashes covered that fierce glint. For a time, he seemed so quiet, as if entirely detached from the world around him.

Jiang Suizhou stopped in his tracks.

Just then, a maid carrying a box passed by Huo Wujiu’s side, and inadvertently kicked Huo Wujiu’s wheelchair.

Huo Wujiu only swayed slightly, but the maid stumbled from the bump and almost dropped the box.

The maid stood still and complained loudly, “Why are you getting in the way? Don’t you know to sit farther away?”

With that, she glared at Huo Wujiu and walked away.

Jiang Suizhou frowned.

His feet uncontrollably turned away from the study, and he crossed the threshold of the main room and walked in.

“What did you just say?” He asked with a frown.

Why were these people, whose names he didn’t even know, so good at asking trouble for him? He was trying every means to secretly please Huo Wujiu, but this group of people were good. They’re bullying him openly!

The servants in the room were all stunned and looked towards Jiang Suizhou.

They saw Jiang Suizhou’s icy eyes fixed on the maid.

The maid holding the box was startled. The moment she saw Jiang Suizhou looking at her, she immediately realized that he heard her words. She did not dare to argue. She hugged the box and kneeled in front of Jiang Suizhou with a thud.

He looked at the maid with downcast eyes and said coldly, “Do you know you’re wrong?”

The servant girl nodded her head repeatedly and answered yes.

Jiang Suizhou then asked, “To whom should you confess your mistake?”

The maid hurriedly put down the box, kneeled down in front of Huo Wugou, and kowtowed to him: “I was momentarily rude. Please forgive me, Madam!”

But Huo Wujiu sat there, leaning sideways without even raising his eyes, as if everything in front of him had nothing to do with him.

Jiang Suizhou faltered.

He knew that this maid deserved punishment for saying such things. But…

At this time, Meng Qianshan was not by his side. He had just arrived, and he still didn't know the rules of the mansion about punishing servants. He did not know how much the penalty should be, and as a modern man, he could not issue an order to make her kneel or be beaten.

After a moment's contemplation, he said indifferently, "Go find Meng Qianshan and receive punishment."

The maid hastened to salute him.

Jiang Suizhou found that the roomful of servants were silent and dared not make noise, so he thought his reprimand was useful. At least the people in this courtyard would no longer dare to bully Huo Wujiu easily anymore.

He breathed a sigh of relief, turned and left.

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Chapter 13.2

He did what he had to do, and now, he was going to the study to enjoy a happy time without Huo Wujiu.

But he didn’t see that after he left, the maid who was kneeling on the ground revealed a look of resignation.

Her name was Tao Zhi. His Highness originally thought highly of her in this room, and except for Meng Qianshan, she usually attended to His Highness.

She never imagined that His Highness would reprimand her for such a cripple, so it was quite humiliating.

However, although His Highness lectured her on such a big mistake, he did not punish her personally, so she assumed that her master still cherished her. He just happened to hear and so reprimanded her a bit.

She looked up and coldly glanced at Huo Wujiu.

It was all this cripple’s fault.

Jiang Suizhou also did not see how cold Huo Wujiu’s eyes were hidden beneath his drooping eyelashes, as he sat in the corner.

When Jiang Suizhou walked out of the room, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and gave him a cool, icy look.

He just thought King Jing was quite funny.

If King Jing wanted to send people to spy on him, he should just do it directly; why bother to pretend to defend him in front of him?

…He even put on a play, spending the night in front of my bed.

These actions were unnecessary.

——

Night had fallen, and it was time for dinner.

The King entered the study and dismissed everyone from the room, even Eunuch Qianshan was no exception, but this was nothing unusual. Usually, when the King was busy, he disliked disturbance from others.

Because there was now an additional master in the room, the kitchen still prepared the evening meal one after another, even when the King had not come out of the study.

In a short while, someone sent news.

“Two Sirs have invited His Highness to dinner, so His Highness isn’t going to eat in the house today,” a young servant reported.

Meng Qianshan was waiting outside the study room, so Tao Zhi had the final say in the room. The maids looked at her one after another. They saw her looking around, her eyes finally falling contemptuously on Huo Wujiu.

He was currently sitting under the window, reading a book in his hand.

“Then what are you still standing there for? Serve the meal.” She said coldly. “His Highness is not going to eat in the house today, so do you want to starve the master in the room?”

The people around her did not dare to provoke her. At her order, they went about their business.

Seeing this, Sun Yuan, who was waiting next to Huo Wujiu, hurriedly stepped forward to push Huo Wujiu’s wheelchair, leading him to the table.

Huo Wujiu didn’t say anything, only put the book aside.

Only he knew how much he hated reading books.

Huo Wujiu grew up annoyed at the sight of words, so he either skipped class to ride horses in the barracks, or found ways to torment the teacher for fun. When he was around seven or eight years old, two teachers quit in a fury. Yangguan was remote, and it was difficult to find a teacher, so his father chased him angrily with a horse whip for a long time.

Even now, he had a headache after reading a book. But laughable as it might be, he couldn’t do anything else now other than flip through the things that gave him headaches.

Huo Wujiu glanced at the book.

After Sun Yuan saw him put down his book, he pushed Huo Wujiu’s wheelchair to the table.

Several dishes were already laid out on the table, and Tao Zhi had also given the word earlier, so hot dishes were brought in one after another. The evening meal was very rich and exquisite because it was prepared with Jiang Suizhou in mind. The dishes were warm and appetizing under the bright lights.

Tao Zhi stood watching, her face as cold as frost.

She was born beautiful, and when she came to the royal residence, even the dealer said that she might become a concubine if she was lucky. Then she could rise from servant to master.

She climbed step by step to her present position, but did not realize that her master only liked men.

What was so great about men? Even if he was a man, Madam Gu was nothing more than that. Yet how could the tall and big cripple in front of her still get into her master’s harem?!

Because of the disgrace Tao Zhi suffered this afternoon, she became more displeased the more she looked at Huo Wujiu.

What was the use of his beauty? What was the use of being a general? He was maimed and had to go to someone's harem to serve men, Tao Zhi thought with hatred.

Just then, a maid came with soup. When she crossed the threshold, she was careless and almost spilled it.

…*Besides, His Highness was not here tonight.*

Tao Zhi walked forward with a cold face and took the soup with one hand.

"Why are you so rash?" She gave the maid a cross look.

The maid apologized evenly.

But she saw Tao Zhi give her a glaring quick glance, and with the soup in her hand, she turned around and walked towards the table.

The next moment, she rather deliberately bumped into the table, and tipped the bowl of hot soup downward, pouring all the content onto Huo Wujiu's lap.

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Chapter 14.1

The steam rose, and the whole bowl of soup was suddenly splashed all over Huo Wujiu’s legs, dripping down along the fabric of his robe.

The maids all around the room cried out in alarm. Sun Yuan at the back also jumped up in shock and hurriedly grabbed a cloth towel to help wipe him.

Huo Wujiu was the only one sitting there motionless.

Even if the boiling hot soup spilled on his robe and not directly on his skin, it still hurt.

But the pain of the flesh was nothing to him. He only lowered his eyes and looked at his legs.

He watched as she deliberately poured the soup over him. That move in the eyes of martial arts practitioners was the most clumsy slow motion, but he could not avoid it.

Because his legs could not move.

This kind of humiliation was much harder to endure than physical pain.

A moment later, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and gave Tao Zhi a faint look.

If she hadn’t been a woman, he would have returned the hot soup a hundredfold, pouring it all down her throat.

But he would never raise his hand against a woman.

However, this cold and sinister glance also made Tao Zhi shiver with fright, and she retreated back involuntarily.

Then, she came back to her senses.

What was she doing? This cripple glared at her, and she actually got scared?

What was so scary about him? The King was not in the residence today anyway! She was the only one in the courtyard who had the final say right now. She didn't believe that other servants dared to rat her out to the King, nor did she believe that this cripple had the face to go to the King to complain!

Tao Zhi immediately glared back and sneered: "Blame me for being careless and tripping accidentally. It's just that Master didn't know how to dodge. Otherwise, you wouldn't have been scalded."

Then, she raised her eyes and looked at Sun Yuan at the back of the room.

"Why are you so stupid, you servant? I asked you to serve here and push Master's wheelchair. What are you doing standing there? Since you're so stupid, you should go out and sweep the yard tomorrow!"

The King usually stayed in Anyin Hall for a short time, and Meng Qianshan would accompany him everywhere he went, so she was used to playing the tyrant in this courtyard.

Naturally, she scolded everyone around her to her heart's content. After the scolding, a few bolder ones would step forward to pacify her and smooth things over.

However, this time, when she finished scolding, the room was so quiet that even a pin drop could be heard.

She took a few breaths and looked around with a frown.

The room was full of maids, each with their heads hung low, like a group of quails.

Tao Zhi sized them up and frowned unhappily.

What? Was it because a concubine was in the room today that they were scared like this? He was just a cripple who couldn’t even walk. What was so scary about him?

She snorted coldly and turned around to leave.

But just as she whirled around, she spotted two people standing in front of the door of the room.

Tao Zhi’s legs went limp, and she dropped on her knees.

“Y-Your Highness!”

——

Jiang Suizhou stayed in the study until twilight.

An invitation was sent to him early, and two officials from the Ministry of Works invited him out to drink at night. Jiang Suizhou was new to this place and didn’t even know how well he could drink, so he weighed his options and chose to abstain from the banquet.

He stalled for a while and simply asked Meng Qianshan to personally take the post back, saying that he did not sleep well last night and caught a cold; he was recovering at home today.

Fortunately, he was notoriously known for being sick, so the excuse went quite well, and the two did not press the issue any further.

After dealing with this matter, Jiang Suizhou left the study.

Although his room was now stuffed with a ferocious sick tiger, he couldn’t take this excuse to skip dinner.

To his surprise, just as he reached the door of his main room, he happened to hear Tao Zhi reproaching Huo Wujiu cryptically.

The maid was standing in front of the table, blocking Huo Wujiu, who was sitting in his wheelchair. She stood with arms akimbo, and her shrill voice

could be heard from a distance.

When Meng Qianshan saw this picture, his face changed drastically. He was about to speak, but Jiang Suizhou raised hand to stop him.

Although Jiang Suizhou couldn’t see the maid’s face, he could tell from her clothing that she was the one who bumped into Huo Wujiu when carrying a box at noon today. He thought that she would no longer dare to act out after he had scolded her, but he didn’t expect this maid to be so arrogant.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t tell if she thought her own life was too long or if she had lived long enough.

He just quietly watched her arrogantly fly off the handle, and then watched her turn around and look at him in surprise. Then her legs went jelly in fright, and she collapsed to the ground.

Jiang Suizhou looked at her shivering appearance, a little speechless.

What was the use of being afraid now? Why didn’t she know how to be afraid when facing the fiendish-looking Huo Wujiu just now?

He had always loathed people with these deep-rooted bad habits.

As a man transmigrating back a thousand years, he thought he retained the respect he should have for life and personality. However, there were some people who were respected for their personality, but wanted to trample on others’; originally, they were enslaved, but turned their heads to put on a superior air to enslave others.

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Chapter 14.2

Meng Qianshan saw Jiang Suizhou's cold face, but remained silent, so he took a step forward and said sharply, "Miss Tao Zhi, what majesty you have! Do you still remember that Madam Huo is the master? Seeing you like this, it seems that you regard yourself as the master!"

Tao Zhi tremblingly kowtowed one after another and hastily resorted to sophistry, "Your Highness, this servant hasn't! I-It's the manservant, pushing Madam's wheelchair! He pushed the wheelchair and bumped into me, so I accidentally spilled the soup on Madam…"

"Am I blind?"

Jiang Suizhou scowled and interrupted her.

Tao Zhi shivered in terror. She kowtowed and knelt on the ground, not daring to raise her head.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze and said indifferently, "Meng Qianshan."

Meng Qianshan immediately understood, and said: "Are you still going to keep her here to obstruct His Highness's eyes? Drag her out!"

Immediately, two servants from the corridor came forward and dragged Tao Zhi away.

Jiang Suizhou knew that Meng Qianshan would handle it for him. He massaged his brow and walked to Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu's legs were wet, and the soup bowl next to him was still steaming.

Being splashed with a bowl of soup was extremely humiliating. What was more, the maid splashed it deliberately on Huo Wujiu's leg, which was like sprinkling a handful of salt on someone's wound.

Looking at him sitting in a wheelchair without saying a word, Jiang Suizhou inexplicably felt choked up.

He struggled to withdraw his gaze.

He had let the man suffer here, so he definitely couldn't do nothing. Nonetheless, as a proud and cold King, he couldn't just apologize to him either.

Jiang Suizhou had a headache.

He paused and said, "Go, first push the Madam to the back to change into a clean robe."

He needed to organize his thoughts.

Sun Yuan immediately responded, pushing the wheelchair behind the screen in the inner room.

Jiang Suizhou sat down at the table, raised his hand and rubbed his forehead.

He was planning to stay quiet when he saw Sun Yuan, who had just gone behind the screen, coming back alone again.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes: "What's the matter?"

Sun Yuan stood there empty-handed and at a loss: "Madam said, there is no need for a servant."

Jiang Suizhou's gaze involuntarily fell on the screen.

He could vaguely see a seated figure through the screen.

He paused, grunted in reply, and said nothing more.

For some reason, he could clearly understand Huo Wujiu's mood at this time. Because he has studied history for nearly a decade, and wrote several papers on Huo Wujiu alone, he knew that Huo Wujiu didn't need anyone.

Even if Huo Wujiu was crippled, he did not need others to take care of him as one would a disabled person. He was a falcon born in the sandstorms of Yangguan, with an irrepressible vitality, and was especially independent and proud.

He wasn't so easy to kill, but it was even harder to keep him in a cage and serve him feasts of delectable dishes every day.

He didn't need these either.

Jiang Suizhou pondered. He was supposed to think about his wording and countermeasures for a while, but his mind drifted away uncontrollably.

The room was quiet, except for the faint sound of clothes rustling and the sound of the wheelchair shifting behind the screen.

Not long after, Huo Wujiu changed into a clean robe and emerged from behind the screen while steering his wheelchair.

Sun Yuan hurriedly went forward to push his wheelchair for him.

Huo Wujiu had no clothes to change into here, and none of the several masters in the mansion had such a tall figure as he did. He was now wearing a makeshift rough top and trousers worn by servants.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes to look at him.

This man was handsome and a walking mannequin. It was obviously just gray, coarse clothes, but on him, it exuded a warrior's aura.

Sun Yuan quickly pushed Huo Wujiu's wheelchair to the table. Jiang Suizhou picked up the chopsticks and stole a glance at Huo Wujiu.

He remembered that Huo Wujiu still had injuries on his legs. Although they were on his calves, they were also likely splashed by the hot soup.

But looking at Huo Wugou’s silent demeanor, Jiang Suizhou lost his confidence.

If nothing was wrong with him, it would be inappropriate to call for a doctor rashly. However, he knew that Huo Wujiu was particularly forbearing. Whether he was truly scalded or not, Jiang Suizhou was not quite sure…

With that in mind, he couldn’t help but peek at Huo Wujiu a few more times.

But at that moment, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes at him, catching his sneaky gaze with precision.

Jiang Suizhou averted his eyes in an attempt to cover up, but unwittingly exposed himself. Huo Wujiu, on the other hand, remained poker-faced, quietly looking straight at him, seemingly waiting for him to speak.

…*I was caught red-handed. There’s no hiding it.*

Jiang Suizhou cleared his throat, and while chucking vegetables, he spoke faintly, “Were your bandages soaked?”

“No,” Huo Wujiu replied.

His voice was quite low and nice, diffused in the night, like a mellow liquor.

Jiang Suizhou gave a faint grunt.

“That person has taken things too far and won’t reappear here in the future,” he informed.

Huo Wugou didn’t make a sound.

Jiang Suizhou also did not expect him to respond to him and only signaled Meng Qianshan.

Meng Qianshan quickly nodded and bowed: “Don’t worry, Master! There will be no more next time!”

Jiang Suizhou gave an “Hmm” and said no more.

He thought to himself that he should show a guilty stance because of today’s incident, and then slowly change his attitude towards him.

As for the people in the room, there was no need to worry. After today’s incident, no one would dare to neglect Huo Wujiu again.

He knew that Huo Wujiu didn’t need this kind of care, but he needed to use this to shine a light on his attitude – at least let Huo Wujiu know that although he didn’t like him, Jiang Suizhou had no intention of targeting him.

The meal was extremely silent.

When the meal was finished, the maids took the dishes off the table and went to the inner room to clean up.

The books that His Highness read at night and the beds that the masters slept on must be properly organized.

Jiang Suizhou sat by, holding a book in his hand and watching Meng Qianshan lead the servants to the bedroom to tidy up.

His gaze was a little stiff.

Today, he was too comfortable being alone in the study, so he accidentally forgot about this important matter.

His gaze fell on Huo Wujiu who was beside him, and lowered his eyes heavily, looking at the book in his hand.

…If Huo Wujiu sleeps in my bedroom, where am I going to sleep?

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Chapter 15.1

After the servants cleaned up the bedroom and waited for Jiang Suizhou to wash up and change into his sleeping attire, they were all driven out by Jiang Suizhou.

“No need to wait here.” Jiang Suizhou lounged on the couch, holding a book in one hand, and coldly instructed, “I will read a book and rest on my own later.”

Hearing his orders, Meng Qianshan looked at the cold and arrogant Jiang Suizhou. He then glanced at the inner room.

Madam Huo was washing and cleaning up alone there.

Meng Qianshan replied with a meaningful glance and led everyone to retreat.

No servant was left in the room, and before leaving, Meng Qianshan also thoughtfully closed the door for Jiang Suizhou.

Everyone withdrew, and in a blink, the large room was dead silent, with only the sound of splashing water in the inner room.

There was no one else.

Jiang Suizhou let out a sigh of relief. He relaxingly put the book down, and slumped onto the couch.

It was too sad. Jiang Suizhou thought he would only use the couch for one night, but he did not expect that he would not have the opportunity to sleep on a bed again after transmigrating.

He inwardly formulated a plan.

He must improve Huo Wujiu's impression of him and earn his trust as soon as possible, and then find an opportunity to quickly expel him from his room.

But until then…he couldn't escape the fate of sleeping on the couch.

After calming down on the couch for a while, Jiang Suizhou resignedly picked up the book and sat up straight again.

He held the book in one hand, but could not register the contents. After reading two lines, he involuntarily lowered his head and patted the couch beneath him.

Hmm…Fortunately, the couch in my room feels quite comfortable.

With that in mind, he propped himself up on the couch again with one hand and looked behind him.

It was quite wide and around a meter and a half. He was sure he could use it for naps during the day. There were several pillows that looked pretty solid against the backrest, so he didn't know whether they were soft or not.

Jiang Suizhou leaned forward, grabbed one in his hand, and squeezed it a few times.

Eh, quite soft.

Jiang Suizhou grew up with no worries about food and clothing, and never thought he would one day be happy to have a couch to sleep on with comfortable pillows for him to use.

…In fact, I wasn't able to sleep soundly on the first two days, so sitting on this couch is somewhat of a stress reliever.

The corners of Jiang Suizhou's mouth couldn't help but curl into a smile at the soft touch in his hand, then he squeezed the pillow some more.

Suddenly, a creak sounded.

Jiang Suizhou was caught off guard. He was startled and turned his head on instinct.

He realized that Huo Wujiu emerged from the inner room at some point, and was sitting at the door of the inner room. His pair of pitch-black eyes locked quietly on Jiang Suizhou.

The creak came from his wheelchair.

Jiang Suizhou tossed the pillow away.

…I was too relaxed just now and forgot for a moment that there was another person in the room!

Jiang Suizhou was suddenly at a loss for words. He grabbed his book in one hand and hurriedly sat up straight. But behind him, the original neatly stacked pillows had been tossed around, and a quick glance revealed what he had just done.

Jiang Suizhou was so embarrassed that his scalp began to tingle.

But fortunately, Huo Wujiu was still indifferent to him.

Huo Wujiu's eyes didn't linger on Jiang Suizhou for long. Huo Wujiu didn't care about what he did in the slightest. He only swept a faint glance over him, then turned his eyes away and steered his wheelchair out.

Jiang Suizhou suddenly felt grateful for his perpetual indifference.

Jiang Suizhou cleared his throat and propped one hand on his forehead, posing as if nothing had happened while blocking the expression in his eyes.

His eyes were dead set on his book, and he spoke coldly, "Go to bed."

After saying that, he never looked up again.

Although he put on the appearance of concentrating on his book, Jiang Suizhou's ears were a hundred percent on alert, tuning in to Huo Wujiu's movements.

He heard Huo Wujiu swing his wheelchair to the side of the bed and listened to him slowly crawl into bed. Then, Huo Wujiu laid down quietly and did not make another sound.

Jiang Suizhou heaved a sigh of relief.

He thought inwardly: *As long as Huo Wujiu doesn't mention it, what do I have to be embarrassed about? I'm not embarrassed.*

But this brainwashing was futile. Afterward, for most of the hour, he could not register a single word of the book in his hand and kept replaying what just happened.

Huo Wujiu probably didn't see the way he squeezed his pillow like a fool, right? The sound Jiang Suizhou heard just now was the rattling of the wheelchair, which meant that Huo Wujiu just came out at that time and did not necessarily see what he was doing…

Jiang Suizhou's was having a war deep inside, wishing his stare could dig a hole in his book. He was oblivious to the light glance that Huo Wujiu, who was lying on the bed, gave him.

When Jiang Suizhou lowered his head and covered his face in mortification, all this fell into Huo Wujiu's eyes.

A rabbit in a fox's skin accidentally revealed his short little tail.

The corner of Huo Wujiu's lips twitched.

——

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Chapter 15.2

Late into the night.

Huo Wujiu, who was lying on the bed, had not moved, so Jiang Suizhou then put out the lamp, pulled a blanket, then slept on the couch.

As expected, he slept quite soundly that night.

The couch wasn't completely comfortable, but Jiang Suizhou practically stayed up all night for two consecutive days and had already exhausted his energy. Therefore, as soon as he touched the pillow, he sunk into a deep sleep, and had a dreamless night.

Until the day dawned.

Jiang Suizhou was sleeping when he felt someone carefully patting him. When he opened his eyes, he saw a shocked Meng Qianshan standing in the hazy morning light.

Fright instantly awakened Jiang Suizhou.

He sat up and saw Meng Qianshan bowing in front of him with an envelope in one hand. With a surprised look, he glanced at the bed, then at Jiang Suizhou, and spoke in a stammering voice, "Master, why are you sleeping in…"

Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth and lowered his voice to interrupt him, "Is something the matter?"

This Meng Qianshan was fine everywhere else, but he was a bit foolish.

What other servant would, having seen his master sleeping on the couch, ask him, “Why are you sleeping on the sofa?”!

Meng Qianshan froze, handed the envelope to Jiang Suizhou, and said, “This came last night…”

Jiang Suizhou paused and immediately raised his hand, signaling Meng Qianshan to shut his mouth first.

He glanced at Huo Wujiu on the bed.

At this time, the sky was only slightly bright, and it was far from time to get up. Huo Wujiu looked to be sound asleep, so their talking would surely wake him up.

Meng Qianshan followed Jiang Suizhou’s line of sight and instantly understood.

Meng Qianshan hurriedly and soundlessly followed Jiang Suizhou outside.

The two of them walked all the way outside of the bedroom and closed the door before they spoke again.

“What is it?” Jiang Suizhou asked.

Meng Qianshan handed him the envelope in his hand and said, “Your Highness, the two lords who asked you to have a drink last night asked someone to secretly deliver this before dawn this morning, saying that they had intended to hand it to you yesterday, but you were unwell, so they rushed to deliver it today.”

Jiang Suizhou took the envelope.

He had a rough idea what it contained. The two people who had asked him to drink yesterday were both minor officials of the Ministry of Works. He believed that the information they had sent him was most likely related to the repair of the ancestral hall.

He took the envelope, gave a hum, and turned around to leave.

But at this moment, Meng Qianshan actually stepped forward and stopped him.

Jiang Suizhou frowned at him, then saw righteous indignation written all over Meng Qianshan's face.

"How can Madam Huo let you sleep on the couch?!"

Jiang Suizhou was a bit speechless.

How dare you ask! I interrupted you so you wouldn't say anything, yet you still asked!

Jiang Suizhou answered indifferently, "Is it your business?" Then, he turned around in an attempt to go inside.

But he saw Meng Qianshan face death unflinchingly.

"It should be none of my business, but Your Highness is so sick and weak. How can I allow him to bully you to this extent!"

Jiang Suizhou could hear the tremor in Meng Qianshan's voice. At first glance, he was scared. But he forcibly stopped himself and whispered, "Is Madam Huo bullying you because of his superior martial arts skills? Your Highness, don't be afraid, this is not their Northern Liang, where he can run wild…"

Jiang Suizhou helplessly raised his hand and cut his words short.

He knew of Meng Qianshan's sincere loyalty, but this man…he really had a one-track mind!

Jiang Suizhou asked coldly, "Why are you shooting in the dark? Mind your own business."

After saying that, he went around Meng Qianshan and pushed the door of the room open.

But behind him, Meng Qianshan's voice sounded aggrieved and puzzled.

“Your Highness is sleeping on the couch. Why do you want to get this person into your courtyard?”

…If I don’t make it clear, is there no way to get over this?

Jiang Suizhou took a deep breath, closed the room door and turned around.

“I want to sleep by myself,” he said.

Meng Qianshan was filled with surprise.

Then he saw his own master’s face as frosty as ice as he spoke stiffly, “Although he is a concubine, my heart fell for him, and I do not want to insult him at will. Understand?”

Meng Qianshan’s eyes were about to pop out: “You, Your Highness! But you only…you only met him for the first time two days ago!”

….And now you also got to the bottom of it.

Jiang Suizhou just wanted to quickly fool this rash young man, and made up nonsense, “How do you know it was the first time? When the Marquis of Dingbei returned to the capital, I had seen him at that time and had long been attracted to him. Since then…time has passed, and although I have not seen him in person, I frequently received news about him.”

Meng Qianshan was dumbfounded.

It was obvious to Jiang Suizhou that Meng Qianshan believed him, so he stopped talking and warned, “No one else knows about this matter, and I haven’t revealed a hint of it in front of Madam Huo. Therefore, even if you know, you must keep it to yourself. Remember?”

Meng Qianshan’s eyes were frozen straight at this point, and he nodded his head stupidly.

Jiang Suizhou faintly glanced at him, turned around and pushed the door open again.

It was still early, and instead of arguing with Meng Qianshan there, he might as well go back and sleep for another half an hour.

With this in mind, he gingerly returned to his couch. As he was lying down, he did not forget to shoot Huo Wujiu a few glances.

Huo Wujiu remained motionless and still hadn’t awakened.

Jiang Suizhou laid down in relief and closed his eyes.

Unbeknownst to him, the moment he closed his eyes, a pair of pitch-black eyes slowly opened in the darkness.

The man frowned, his face brimming with surprise. His eyes fell on Jiang Suizhou’s back with extreme complexity.

What Jiang Suizhou didn’t know was that Huo Wujiu had been in the army for many years, and even in his sleep, the slightest noise could wake him up immediately.

He also didn’t know that Huo Wujiu had extremely sharp eyes and keen ears. Even through the door, even when he lowered his voice, Huo Wujiu heard every word he said.

Not a single word was left out.

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Chapter 16.1

Dawn had fallen.

Jiang Suizhou wanted to get back to sleep, but did not expect sleep to escape him once he lay back again. Therefore, he got up early, and Meng Qianshan prepared breakfast in advance.

Huo Wujiu also got up very early.

Although they shared the same bedroom, there was basically no communication between them. Meng Qianshan waited for Jiang Suizhou to finish washing up, while Huo Wujiu went to the inner room to clean up. When Huo Wujiu returned with his wheelchair, Sun Yuan pushed his wheelchair to the table.

The breakfast meal was already on the table, and Jiang Suizhou was sitting there reading a book.

He didn’t necessarily have to wait for Huo Wujiu to eat together, but the table manners ingrained in him since childhood forced him to wait for everyone to gather before he could start eating.

Upon seeing Huo Wujiu, Jiang Suizhou put down his book and automatically picked up his chopsticks.

Even when they were eating breakfast together, they looked at each other without saying anything.

But today, Jiang Suizhou had a feeling that something was wrong.

He felt like Huo Wujiu kept sizing him up, but whenever he looked at him, Huo Wujiu was eating with his eyes down. He didn’t even spare him a

glance at all.

It was quite weird.

But Meng Qianshan, who was waiting on the side, caught his master peeking at Madam Huo all morning. He only took it as his master being unable to help himself in front of his sweetheart.

At this time, as a qualified servant, he naturally shared his master's worries.

With these thoughts in mind, Meng Qianshan smilingly spoke, "Master, a carpenter has already come yesterday. I remember you had mentioned that Madam's wheelchair was not working well, so I asked him to hurry up. The new wheelchair will be delivered to our courtyard within the day."

Jiang Suizhou looked up and saw Meng Qianshan blinking at him vigorously.

It was a no-brainer. This kid was showing off for Jiang Suizhou in front of Huo Wujiu, making innuendos to inform Huo Wujiu how good Jiang Suizhou was to him.

Jiang Suizhou was somewhat speechless. However, on second thought, all roads lead to Rome. Just say Meng Qianshan was pleasing Huo Wujiu on his behalf.

So, he grunted and replied offhandedly, "Not bad. If it arrives early, take it out for a spin and try it out to see if it works."

Just as well. Anyway, he worked in the Ministry of Rites while this bigmouth Meng Qianshan was also idle; might as well let him help Jiang Suizhou push Huo Wujiu out for a breath of fresh air.

Meng Qianshan agreed with a broad grin.

"If Your Highness comes back early, we can also go out for a walk together!" He said.

…*That's asking for too much.*

Jiang Suizhou glanced at him warningly.

Meng Qianshan promptly shut his mouth with a grin.

But as Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze, he suddenly collided with Huo Wujiu's gaze.

Huo Wujiu was looking at him. His eyes were still cold, but there were dashes of complexities that Jiang Suizhou couldn't understand.

Huo Wujiu's brow was also furrowed.

Jiang Suizhou was caught off guard. Huo Wujiu averted his eyes and didn't look at him again.

Jiang Suizhou was momentarily dazed.

Er…Did he provoke him with what he just said?

——

Jiang Suizhou didn't bother to care what was wrong with Huo Wujiu. After breakfast, he went straight to the Ministry of Rites' office to slack off.

Only the extremely diligent Meng Qianshan was left behind to serve Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu coldly watched Meng Qianshan bustling around him until the carpenter who sent the wheelchair arrived. The eunuch left temporarily, finally allowing Huo Wujiu to clear his mind for the time being.

He raised his hand and rubbed his temples.

Meng Qianshan was so noisy.

Just then, Sun Yuan, who had been waiting behind him, cautiously stepped forward and slipped something into his hand.

Huo Wujiu looked up at him and saw that Sun Yuan was stiff, and nervousness was almost written on his face.

“This is..Someone asked me to give it to you,” Sun Yuan lowered his voice and stuttered.

He had never done anything like this before, and it was too much for him to handle.

The day before he pushed Madam Huo to the courtyard, someone stopped him on his way out of the house and slipped a silver ingot to bring a letter to Madam Huo.

What kind of person was His Highness, and what kind of person was Madam Huo? He naturally did not dare to do it. He hastily refused and ran. Fortunately, that person was not a vicious person. When Sun Yuan refused, he didn’t force him nor silence him.

As a result, His Highness instructed the next day that any letters and articles, as long as someone sent them, should be given to Madam Huo in private.

This in turn scared Sun Yuan silly.

However, he dared not go against the King’s command.

Last night, Sun Yuan met the man again on his way home from the residence.

“Just think of it as me begging you to send this letter in,” the man said. “General Huo is not an imprudent man. Just deliver it, and he will not leave any evidence behind to implicate you.”

Sun Yuan halted.

S-Since the King ordered it…

Seeing him hesitate, hope immediately surfaced on the man’s face: “What about it? I can add more money; this is negotiable!”

Sun Yuan had always been honest, so upon hearing this, he stammered in fright.

I-It wasn't about money either. However, it seemed that Sun Yuan couldn't just say that it was the King who asked him to deliver the letter…

Sun Yuan stammered for a moment and then replied, "Okay, pay me more."

The man hurriedly asked, "How much?"

"…Add two more silver coins, I guess."

The man: "…?"

So, ridden with the doubt of "how did this man raise the price so affordably", the man handed the letter over to Sun Yuan, who in turn handed it to Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu glanced at the envelope in his hand and raised his head. His scrutinizing gaze fell on Sun Yuan.

Huo Wujiu's gaze made Sun Yuan feel so guilty that he didn't risk taking a breath. Sun Yuan just stood there like a bamboo pole.

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“Who asked you to send this?” Huo Wujiu asked in a low voice.

Sun Yuan stammered, “I didn’t recognize…”

Huo Wujiu interjected, “I mean, whose order was it allowing you to send me letters?”

His Highness wouldn’t let him say!

Sun Yuan’s lips twitched, but he didn’t say a word.

Even if he did not say a word, Huo Wujiu understood from Sun Yuan’s appearance alone.

…*Unbelievable.*

Huo Wujiu followed his father back to Yecheng once or twice when he was young, but he couldn’t remember ever crossing paths with King Jing even once.

It was beyond outrageous that King Jing fancied him as he had declared. But, thinking about King Jing’s performance in the past few days, it really did seem to be the case…

There seemed to be an explanation to his sheep in wolf’s clothing appearance, his attempts at being fierce and tough, and his inexplicable good treatment of Huo Wujiu.

But…

King Jing just had to insist on stirring some messy thoughts, huh. These past few days, King Jing was akin to a fuel guzzler, prudently paying attention to him and attending to him. Huo Wujiu witnessed all of this. But…

He slowly rubbed his hand on the envelope's paper cover.

He was a prisoner of war escorted here by an enemy country, yet King Jing dared to send this kind of thing to him. He wondered for a moment whether King Jing was too bold, or whether he was too stupid. Or maybe…

Huo Wujiu frowned in confusion.

Could emotions really deceive people to the point that even their family, country and life could take a back seat?

Huo Wujiu had always been proficient in the art of war and power, but when it came to such things, he was a blank sheet.

His inexperience made him lose his judgment for a while.

His position suddenly became a bit chaotic.

As if whatever plans and calculations he had, it was all like bullying him wantonly on account of his preferences.

——

After Sun Yuan tactfully retreated, Huo Wujiu opened the envelope in his hand.

The letter paper was crumpled and wrinkled, and it was faintly visible how righteously indignant the person was when he wrote the letter.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked out the window.

Meng Qianshan was talking to the carpenter who brought the wheelchair in the courtyard. The carpenter was hurriedly taking notes with a pen and paper, so Meng Qianshan was probably asking him to modify it. As soon as

Meng Qianshan saw Sun Yuan come out, he hastily greeted him and let him sit on the wheelchair, then pushed him around in the courtyard.

He was probably testing to see whether the wheelchair was sturdy.

Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes and unfolded the letter.

[It had been more than ten years since this lowly official parted ways with the former Marquis. Speaking of the Battle of Xunyang, I'm both distraught and angered, but had no way to help. I have no other choice but to feed on His Majesty's official salary. And now, even though I am in Lin'an, I have no face to see you, General.]

Teardrops in flower forms had blurred the words there.

Huo Wujiu frowned and first turned the letter to the last page where it was addressed.

Ji Hongcheng.

He did have some impression of this person. Southern Jing currently had a few generals, and his father's old friend, Lou Yue, was one of them. This person, who wrote the letter, was probably Lou Yue's subordinate in the army at that time, and now held a job in the Ministry of War.

Huo Wujiu turned the letter back over.

This man's remorse and guilt was hinted at in between the lines, but Huo Wujiu did not take it to heart.

In those years, the previous emperor was afraid of the Huo family. Hence, back when the war was tight, he intended to cut off reinforcements, cut off food and grass, and also made up a crime to exterminate the Huo family after the war. His father raised an army because of his deep hatred for the late emperor. It had nothing to do with his home country, so naturally, he didn't involve other colleagues, nor did he need them to join in the rebellion.

Subjects were duty bound to the emperor and to the country. Only talents in the Jianghu could do something such as rising together righteously on account of the code of brotherhood.

Huo Wujiu's gaze faintly swept over the lines of heartfelt words and looked straight back.

Then, his eyebrows slightly rose.

[I know that the General is now in a difficult situation. I hope the General can grin and bear it and maintain your resolve for revenge. King Jing is by no means a good person. Today at the court, he even spoke obscenely with His Majesty and shamelessly shared his joyous intimacy with you in the court. Afterward, His Majesty ordered to have you face him, but his disgust was so overwhelming that he even gave up the right to repair the ancestral hall just to keep you imprisoned in the backyard.

It is obvious that this person is dirty and despicable, so I hope you will take care of yourself. General Lou is currently suppressing bandits in Lingnan, so this lowly official's thoughts count for little. I'm at my wit's end, so I can't repay the old marquis for his kindness. However, the General can rest assured. If there comes a day when I can be of use to you, I'll do my best.]

That was the end of a short letter.

Huo Wujiu held the letter over the lamp on the table that Sun Yuan had specially lit for him.

The fire licked the letter and immediately burnt one corner to ashes.

Huo Wujiu suddenly jerked the letter back from the fire.

He took the letter, which had been burned and mutilated, and after a pause, his gaze fell on the penultimate paragraph again.

He actually couldn't help but read that passage several times.

By the time he came back to his senses, he was on the verge of memorizing it. He subtly froze and passed the letter to the fire, burning it cleanly along

with the envelope.

The flames danced slightly in his eyes.

Huo Wujiu stared at the fire, his brow furrowed in several gullies.

He really did not expect…

Even his father’s old friends knew what it was to be worldly-wise and play safe. However, such a timid white rabbit, who had nothing to do with him and was fierce in appearance but faint in the heart, could contend in the court on his behalf, even in exchange for the power in his hands.

…*Just so that I would suffer less humiliation from the emperor.*

He never thought that he would one day be protected by a person with such thin shoulders.

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Jiang Suizhou naturally did not know how Huo Wujiu received that secret letter scolding him. He happily basked in a round of idleness in the Ministry of Rites, then returned to his house and went to his study.

Due to that day's conversation, Ji You's attitude towards him became much better. Today, Ji You also lent him two books, saying that they were for him to read.

Of course, it was two books of unofficial history.

Jiang Suizhou was not very fond of unofficial history because of his personal experience, so after thanking Ji You's kindness, he collected the two books and put them on his desk like nothing.

Who would want to read them? He didn't want to take the risk of somehow transmigrating again.

What was more, he had other things to do ——

For example, the secret letter that the two ministers sent him.

He was extremely cautious and put the letter away when he received it early in the morning. It was only now when no one was around that he unfolded and read it.

——Similar to his conjecture, the letter did not provide much useful information.

These two courtiers were not high officials, but happened to be in the Ministry of Works. Therefore, when the Ministry of Works took over this project, they figured out the budget amount and the person in charge with

some inquiries. They also did some calculations for Jiang Suizhou, and figured out how much spoiles Pang Shao could get here.

The amount was really hefty.

The two courtiers must have felt anxious because of this, and asked him in the letter if they should plant some of their own people in the project.

Jiang Suizhou fell into deep thought.

According to his current understanding of the original owner, he would definitely do something. Even if there would be no return or even loss, he must try it.

But Jiang Suizhou knew that it was all useless.

Pang Shao would never let any official he was not comfortable with handle the money. Thus, even if they slipped their own officials in, they could never touch the money allocated by the court. In this case, all their spies could do was to collect evidence of corruption and report it to the court…

But, how was the relationship between Pang Shao and the Emperor, and how was his relationship with the Emperor?

This was obviously courting destruction.

Moreover, the officials who have been inserted would be pushed to the cusp of the storm, making it easy for Pang Shao to persecute them.

Before transmigrating, he had read history books and found that a lot of Southern Jing officials suffered accidental deaths in certain projects, and those accidents were left unsettled.

Jiang Suizhou did not dare to risk lives.

He pondered for a moment, and read the letter carefully. He wrote down some numbers and names, and then put the letter into a secret compartment on the side of the table.

There were already a lot of letters in there.

All of them were saved by the original owner. Jiang Suizhou took a lot of effort to find this secret compartment.

He also roughly determined the original owner’s sphere of influence based on the letters in it.

Most of the information collected in the letters stored there were fragmentary and of little reference value. But according to the positions of the officials who wrote the letters, it was clear that these people had little real power in their hands, and these fragmentary and pitiful pieces of information were the results of their best efforts.

These officials would painstakingly collect information and give it to the original owner, and the original owner did not disappoint their efforts. There were always traces of circled annotations on the letters in the box, which showed how diligent the original owner’s regard to them was.

Jiang Suizhou stored this letter together with the rest. He carefully locked it up, and then began to write his reply to the two officials.

He did not refuse directly, but only said that they should stay put, and he would act accordingly. If he found a chance to plant them in as spies by then, he would notify them as soonest possible.

Fortunately, there were several letters in the study that the original owner had not yet sent, so Jiang Suizhou barely learned his manner of speaking and finished writing the letter.

After writing, Jiang Suizhou read the letter through and waited for the ink to dry.

He couldn’t help but sigh.

It had been three years since Southern Jing fled across the Yangtze River, and gradually came out of the fear of the country’s destruction. They appeared to have accepted the current division of the river and governing

countries on either side. Until a month or so ago, Huo Wujiu led his troops to the south and disrupted the original balance. But then, he was besieged and captured when the reinforcements were cut off during the river crossing.

This time, even General Huo of the Northern Liang was gone, so the Southern Jing courtiers were naturally more at ease.

It was precisely for this reason that Pang Shao comfortably embezzled and sought power, while the emperor was only devoted to worldly pleasures. The original King Jing and the courtiers behind him were trying their best to seize power from Pang Shao's party, searching for a clear way out of that dark cloud.

However, none of them knew that the dynasty was nearing its fated end, and the edifices were on the verge of collapse.

They were struggling to climb a skyscraper that was about to topple over.

Jiang Suizhou looked out the window.

He gradually accepted the fact that he was brought into this period in history. At the same time, he was also caught in this mighty torrent.

He gradually kind of wanted to help them.

——

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By the time he emerged from the study, it was already dark. He handed the secret letter to Meng Qianshan, and then saw him stuffing it into his sleeves quite skillfully.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze with ease.

Perhaps because he possessed a weaker body, he looked awful after sitting for a long time. When Meng Qianshan saw that his lips were pale, he asked thoughtfully, “Master, you must be tired. Do you want me to prepare a warm bath for you?”

Jiang Suizhou also felt a little tired after hearing his suggestion, so he nodded in agreement.

Meng Qianshan responded repeatedly.

Jiang Suizhou walked all the way back to his room and saw that dinner had already been prepared. Under the brilliant light, Huo Wujiu was sitting there reading a book.

How many books were there in the room? They were all prepared by Meng Qianshan for the original owner as a way to relieve his boredom before going to bed. The original owner preferred obscure Confucian ancient texts, which were all about the ways of governing the world. Jiang Suizhou was used to reading ancient prose, and he didn’t find it boring, but Huo Wujiu was different.

How could a man who danced with swords appreciate these?

With that thought in mind, Jiang Suizhou sat down at the table and asked, “Are you reading?”

His tone was cold, and he made it clear that he was not interested in what he was doing.

He didn't expect Huo Wujiu to pay attention to him either, so that question was nothing more than a conversation opener. When his words fell, he paused, and was about to order Meng Qianshan to send some leisure books to Huo Wujiu, when he suddenly heard a low, mellow voice.

"I'm just skimming through it," replied Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou was startled.

He looked at Huo Wujiu with some disbelief, and saw him eating his meal with an air of complacency.

The words he had prepared reached his mouth, but were blocked by Huo Wujiu's sudden response. For a spell, Jiang Suizhou was rendered speechless.

He saw Huo Wujiu raise his eyes and look at him indifferently.

He wasn't sure if it was his illusion, but he had this feeling that the aggressiveness in Huo Wujiu's gaze this time has faded a lot despite his same old icy, unapproachable countenance. Even the oppressive air dissipated for the most part.

For a while, he was so calm that Jiang Suizhou felt that he must have misread it.

He froze, hastily put away his astonishment, lowered his eyes to grab some food, and said, "I see. What kind of books do you usually read? You can ask Meng Qianshan to bring you some."

As he spoke, he signalled Meng Qianshan with his eyes.

Meng Qianshan nodded repeatedly right after.

But Huo Wujiu spoke up again. "No need," he declined. After a pause, Huo Wujiu looked at him indifferently and then said, "I'm not used to being

taken care of.”

He implied – not only the books, but also the sacrifices Jiang Suizhou made in the court and the letter he had people send to him in the previous days, which he naturally knew in his heart.

He had no control if King Jing insisted on liking him, but he didn’t want to accept King Jing’s favor and kindness.

Benefits received from someone should be returned, but he couldn’t reciprocate this kind of sentiment.

He saw Jiang Suizhou raise his eyes opposite him with a fleeting look of bewilderment in his eyes. Then he smiled coldly and said, “How have I ever taken care of you? I’m just looking for something for you to do, so you won’t give me any trouble.”

Jiang Suizhou was ecstatic deep inside.

How can you not get used to it? For the sake of my life, there are many places of yours I can take care of in the future!

You’d better get used to it sooner!

Huo Wujiu frowned and was about to say something when he saw Meng Qianshan next to him bursting with joy. Meng Qianshan was smiling and nodding his head, saying that he would go and pick out some more for the Madam later and let him choose.

Obviously, the master and servant duo did not intend to listen to his opinion.

Huo Wujiu looked down while Jiang Suizhou also did not speak again. After eating dinner, he went to the side to drink tea to aid with digestion.

He was in a good mood.

When the night was getting late, Meng Qianshan approached him and told him that the bath in the back room was ready, and that he could go and

bathe.

Jiang Suizhou responded, put down his book and went to the back room.

He bypassed the silk screen, and the steam heat rushed to his face. Under the heavy veil, there were flickering candle flames, exuding a bit of charming ambiguity in the misty steam.

A sunken carved copper pool was built in the middle of the back room. It was not too big, only about three to five square feet. At this time, hot water filled the pool along with floating layers of flower petals that permeated a subtle delicate fragrance.

A few maids were standing next to it, presumably to serve Jiang Suizhou in his bath.

…*This was too inappropriate.*

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze and waved his hand, gesturing for them to withdraw.

The maids then obediently retreated. There was not even the sound of footsteps between their actions, and in no time, they completely retreated.

Jiang Suizhou turned his head again, looked at Meng Qianshan, and said, “You can also withdraw.”

Meng Qianshan was stunned: “Huh?”

Um…when did his master ever bathe without someone serving? Except when in Madam Gu’s room…

When this thought popped up, it suddenly dawned on Meng Qianshan.

How could he be so blind! There was another master in the room, so his service was not needed!

He nodded repeatedly and beamed. “Aye! I’ll leave now!”

Jiang Suizhou wondered if Meng Qianshan was having delusions again. Meng Qianshan's expression…how should he put it? It bore a sprinkle of unspeakable lewdness.

When he exited, Jiang Suizhou approached the pool, he leaned down to test the temperature. Then, he removed layers of robes and placed them on the side of the rack.

There was no one around at this time, so his mind relaxed, and he started to ponder things again.

The next day of the Grand Court Assembly was in a couple of days. It seemed appropriate to find a way to confer with the two ministers about today's secret letter…

He thought about it while undressing. Just as he was untying the sash of his loincloth and about to remove his robe, he heard a rattling sound behind him.

Jiang Suizhou whirled around.

He saw Meng Qianshan pushing Huo Wujiu's wheelchair in, and sitting on the wheelchair was Huo Wujiu, who was expressionless, like a Buddha being pushed in.

Behind him, Meng Qianshan smiled crudely and implicitly.

Jiang Suizhou's mind went blank, and the next moment, he immediately understood what this grandson, Meng Qianshan, was planning.

How dare he bring Huo Wujiu here and let him take a c-couple bath with him?

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Jiang Suizhou's gaze turned from amazement to shock to anger. He felt blood rushing straight to his head, causing the roots of his ears to turn red from fury.

The next moment, he clenched his teeth and growled, "Meng Qianshan!"

He felt that Meng Qianshan should be thankful that he was not the original owner. Otherwise, he must have spilled blood on the spot today. A straightforward kill was a light end for him.

Meng Qianshan was stunned. He realized that his bootlicking had swatted the horse's hoof.

He was startled and stammered an explanation, "I-I…Seeing that Master doesn't want to be served by others, I just thought the bathing pool is quite large and also convenient, so…just…"

He couldn't even compose himself.

Having his bare skin out made Jiang Suizhou's a bit cold, so he gathered his inner garment together. He took a deep breath and tried to keep his tone calm: "Did you forget that the doctor only changed his bandages two days ago? You want to soak him in hot water again? Meng Qianshan, if that brain is of little use, I'll ask someone to dig it out for you."

Jiang Suizhou was physically sick and weak, so his breath bore tremors.

Meng Qianshan could no longer care about anything else. He was so scared that he pushed the wheelchair away and ran.

Even as he fled, he didn’t dare to touch Huo Wujiu one bit. He stumbled all the way and pushed Huo Wujiu back to his bedroom.

Jiang Suizhou breathed a sigh of relief and took off his robe again.

Meng Qianshan fled in such a fright that Jiang Suizhou’s thoughts were also abruptly disrupted. But the pool was indeed exquisitely prepared, and the water temperature was also utterly satisfactory. Soaking in it would be the ultimate treat.

So Jiang Suizhou soaked in the pool to his heart’s content. It wasn’t until he was a little tired of being in the water that he got up and changed into new bed clothes and went back to the bedroom.

Meng Qianshan ran away in fear, and only Huo Wujiu, who was sitting in a wheelchair reading a book, was left in the bedroom.

Jiang Suizhou was a bit embarrassed.

It was all that silly Meng Qianshan’s fault….He insisted on pushing Huo Wujiu inside while he was taking a bath.

Jiang Suizhou wiped his hair while walking to the couch and sat down. Perhaps because Huo Wujiu replied to him out of the blue just now, Jiang Suizhou was also more relaxed. So, at this time, Jiang Suizhou also opened his mouth directly to speak.

“It’s Meng Qianshan who’s fooling around,” he said.

Huo Wujiu put down the book and replied indifferently, “It doesn’t matter.” Then, he swung his wheelchair and went to the back room to wash up.

Jiang Suizhou sighed quietly with relief.

He really wasn’t hallucinating…Although Huo Wujiu still treated him coldly, he was willing to respond to him.

——*Although it’s a refusal.*

But it also proved that the efforts Jiang Suizhou had made were effective —— at least, Huo Wujiu felt that he was taking care of him.

Jiang Suizhou watched his back disappear behind the screen and withdrew his gaze. He took the book which he was halfway through reading, and leaned back on the couch to continue reading.

As soon as he laid down on the couch, he noticed the difference.

The cushions were a full layer thicker. The pillows had been changed, and an extremely comfortable quilt had even been laid.

It seemed that Meng Qianshan believed his nonsense this morning. Fearing that he would suffer as a result of sleeping on the couch, Meng Qianshan specially prepared these for him.

Jiang Suizhou immediately forgave Meng Qianshan’s presumptuousness just now.

Was there anything in the world better than being able to get a good night’s sleep?

Currently, there was none.

——

Unbeknownst to him, once Huo Wujiu went around into the back room, his wheelchair paused in place.

His hands slipped inaudibly.

In front of him, hot and humid steam rushed over his face. Amidst the dense white mist was the empty bathing pool, and the water stains left on the floor.

The flower petals in the pool gently rippled with the subtle waves of water, and the man’s dirty robes were hanging on the copper rack next to it.

This scenery easily evoked the picture he had seen just now.

For example, that man’s scattered ink black hair; his tunic that was untied midway; and when he turned around, his glistening chest and abdomen.

Huo Wujiu had been in the military all year round, and had seen too many men’s limbs. In the summer, a group of older men would go to the river to bathe together.

But…he had never seen such a man.

He didn’t know for sure if it was because he hadn’t been exposed to the sun and rain, or if his appearance was just too outstanding, but with just one glance, Huo Wujiu hurriedly averted his eyes.

He had never seen…such a man. He couldn’t even think of an appropriate and non-erotic adjective for him.

Come to think of it, of the men he met, even if they frankly looked at each other, it didn’t feel wrong. There has never been someone like King Jing, who swiftly wrapped himself with his clothes before speaking and whose ear roots turned red from shyness.

…*Like a grown girl.*

Although Huo Wujiu’s impression of girls was also nonexistent, this terrible depiction suddenly popped into his mind when he thought of Jiang Suizhou.

Along with it was his heart that also skipped a couple of beats.

——

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Chapter 18.2

Jiang Suizhou had a good night's sleep. He slept continuously until the next morning, waking up refreshed and his spirits a bit lighter.

Meng Qianshan prepared breakfast early in the morning. Perhaps because he upset Jiang Suizhou last night, the dishes on the table were particularly rich. On top of that, all were also arranged according to Jiang Suizhou's most favorite dishes.

Jiang Suizhou swept Meng Qianshan a quick glance, and saw him smiling awkwardly and flatteringly.

He said nothing, coldly withdrawing his gaze.

He'd better scare Meng Qianshan a bit, to prevent him from committing such smart-ass deeds again and getting himself into trouble.

Hence, it wasn't until Jiang Suizhou finished eating that he opened his mouth coldly and spoke to Meng Qianshan.

"Isn't it time for Madam Huo to change his bandages?" He asked.

Meng Qianshan nodded repeatedly: "The mansion doctor will come later today, so don't worry, Your Highness."

Jiang Suizhou snorted, paused, and then said, "What's the date today?"

Meng Qianshan replied, "Your Highness, it's the eighth day of the month."

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“It’s the fourth day. Send someone to Madam Gu’s courtyard later and inform him that I will have dinner there tonight.”

Meng Qianshan was dumbfounded.

Your Highness! You…how can you say this in front of Madam Huo!

Meng Qianshan stared blankly at Jiang Suizhou for a time, until Jiang Suizhou, who received no response, glanced askance at him. Only then did Meng Qianshan nod blankly, “Yes…I will do so in a while…”

Jiang Suizhou looked at him and frowned.

What was with this kid’s expression? In front of Huo Wujiu, Meng Qianshan was staring at him as if he betrayed his lover!

What if Huo Wujiu saw him like this and thought wrong?

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly stole a glance at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu was eating with his eyes downcast, as if he hadn’t heard anything.

——*Well, since I married Huo Wujiu, I have been at peace with him and haven’t done anything out of the ordinary. I think Huo Wujiu also has an idea in mind and knows that my relationship with him is not the same as my relationship with Gu Changyun and the others.*

…Although my relationship with Gu Changyun is also extremely innocent. Exactly.

With this thought, Jiang Suizhou was relieved. Seeing that the hour was almost up, he got up and went to the Ministry of Rites to continue slacking.

Only Meng Qianshan was left, looking at Huo Wujiu worriedly.

He finally knew what it meant by the emperor was not anxious but his eunuch was.[1]

Men, their upper and lower bodies were really separated. Just like His Highness; he told him yesterday of how deep his love for Madam Hou was. His Highness said that he was so smitten that he couldn’t bear to defile him. Yet today, he said that he was going to his concubine’s room right in front of Madam Huo.

Meng Qianshan fretfully looked at Madam Huo, who looked indifferent and unaffected.

How should he console Madam? Although Madam still looked indifferent, it was unwise to leave a bad impression of His Highness’s philandering ways in his heart.

After a moment of deliberation, he went out of the room. He found a maid and asked her to pass the King’s order to Madam Gu’s room. Then he returned and stood in front of Huo Wujiu.

“Madam Gu entered the mansion earlier, as you know, Master,” he carefully said with a smile piled on his face.

This “master” was already an address of Meng Qianshan’s utmost respect for Huo Wujiu.

Usually, it was the servants who served the concubines in the rear court who addressed their own concubine as master. He, the grand eunuch by the King’s side, naturally would not be so placating.

Huo Wujiu lifted his eyelids and gave Meng Qianshan a look.

Meng Qianshan showed him a flattering smile and consoled him, “Madam Gu is delicate in nature and will make a fuss when he doesn’t see His Highness for a few days. His Highness is impatient of the like, and is even more resistant to him making trouble. I don’t think he really loves that Madam.”

Huo Wujiu frowned.

What was he trying to tell him? What did it matter to him what King Jing was going to do?

Meng Qianshan spoke as if Huo Wujiu was a concubine in the harem, competing for favor.

He heard Meng Qianshan rambling on, “Besides, that Madam Gu is not a reasonable one either. Although His Highness keeps you in the yard day by day, it doesn’t necessarily prevent jealous men from storming to you to vent his displeasure, does it? His Highness will sleep there overnight, but it’s also all for your benefit…”

Huo Wujiu listened to his gossip and found it noisy. He was about to tell him to shut up when he was caught off guard by the word “overnight”.

The picture he saw last night surfaced in front of him again for a moment.

He recalled the man’s moist and slender waist and belly; his thin red ears when he was shy and angry; and his soft whispers through the door that day when he said his heart fell for him a long time ago; that clear and magnetic voice.

What would a man like him look like when he spent the night with another man?

He was stunned.

…*What am I thinking!*

The thought struck without warning. After he recovered, he was so surprised and caught off guard that he was inevitably a little annoyed.

He raised his eyes and gave Meng Qianshan a cold look.

With only one look, Meng Qianshan’s throat choked with fright, and he immediately shut his mouth.

He looked at Huo Wujiu in trepidation.

Huo Wujiu stared back at him. Although Huo Wujiu was looking up from below, his ruthless eyes made people want to kneel down in front of him involuntarily.

Huo Wujiu faltered.

…He wasn't interested in fighting with a eunuch who was missing a string in his head.

He withdrew his gaze.

Although he was now Jiang Suizhou's nominal concubine, to him, it was just a change of jail locations. He didn't succumb to the imperial dungeon of Southern Jing, so naturally, he would never be assimilated in this kind of place.

Of course, he wouldn't go so far as to treat a eunuch viciously for such a thing.

With that in mind, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked at Meng Qianshan again.

"Get out," he ordered.

There was no gentleness, only ferocity.

Footnote:

[1] one himself does not worry but another person worries in vain Want to read more chapters and support us? Please consider becoming a patron to read up to 24 chapters in advance!

Chapter 19.1

When Jiang Suizhou arrived in Gu Changyun's room that night, he was surprised to find that the bedroom was still occupied by Xu Du.

The food was already placed on the table, and no one was left to serve them.

When he saw Jiang Suizhou enter, Gu Changyun saluted him and poured tea for him.

Jiang Suizhou sat down at the main seat.

"Master sent word of your visit earlier this morning, so I had someone cook a dish of Squirrel Mandarin Fish," Gu Changyun said with a smile while moving the plate of fish in front of Jiang Suizhou.

"Would you like to try it, Master?"

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but feel a little puzzled.

He himself originally did not like sweets, especially this kind of sweet and sour southern dish. After staying in the south for a few days, the dishes on the dining table in his room were always mostly northern.

Could it be that the original owner loved sweets?

He looked at Gu Changyun with some suspicion and saw him raise his eyebrows, a hint of surprise on his face.

"Won't you eat it, Master?"

Jiang Suizhou didn’t make a sound and stretched his chopsticks to take a piece of the fish off the plate.

The fish was so sweet and fragrant in the mouth that Jiang Suizhou’s eyebrows could not help but wrinkle.

His chopsticks froze.

Although the soul of King Jing was now him, his body structure was still King Jing’s. The one thing that could affect one’s eating preferences, besides experience, was the taste buds. Since he was originally born without a sweet tooth and also had no psychological barriers, then his body’s reaction to the fish must be from the original owner himself.

The original owner didn’t like sweets, so Gu Changyun’s move was clearly to test him.

Jiang Suizhou chewed a few times and looked at Gu Changyun faintly.

A smile surfaced on Gu Changyun’s face. He seemed to be relieved after his doubts about Jiang Suizhou were dispelled.

Jiang Suizhou did not say a word, only looked at him coldly. His gaze carried two points of scrutiny and warning.

Gu Changyun immediately sensed it. He blinked and said with a smile, “Sure enough, Your Highness still doesn’t like sweets. It’s just a pity that this famous southern dish has not been able to enter your eyes for three years.”

Jiang Suizhou, however, slowly put down his chopsticks.

“You have a lot of guts,” he lowered his eyes to the tabletop and said indifferently.

Gu Changyun stared at him and did not speak for a moment.

Jiang Suizhou asked, “Did you get the result you wanted?”

Gu Changyun stiffened, and then gently laughed out loud.

“Master, what are you talking about? I was just looking at the fresh Mandarin fish that was shipped to the mansion recently, and I wanted them to cook it for you to try.”

Jiang Suizhou’s knuckles slowly knocked on the table, one at a time.

If the people who knew him well were present right now, they would have registered that this was his habitual action whenever he saw through someone’s lies and was thinking about countermeasures.

Jiang Suizhou knew that they had noticed that he was not the original owner.

He had been mentally prepared. After all, these two people were trusted aides of the original owner. Not to mention that they’ve spent a lot of time together, and must also know each other through and through. Moreover, since the original owner was able to bring these two under his command, they were absolutely not idlers. Trying to fool them would be very challenging.

Nevertheless, he did not expect that they would begin to test him only on their second meeting.

This proved that from the first time they met, these two people had sensed that he was different from the original owner.

The sound of his knuckles knocked against the wooden tabletop, one after another. The sound was soft and gentle, and it swept through the quiet room.

Just then, Xu Du, who had been waiting by, spoke.

“Master, please forgive him. Changyun was just being naughty.” He rose to his feet.

Jiang Suizhou glanced at Xu Du, and saw him bowing deeply before him.

“But rest assured, Master, that no matter what happens, his loyalty to you is evident in heaven and earth.”

This was a promise of loyalty.

Jiang Suizhou knew that he was telling him that no matter who he had become now, as long as he remained their master, they would both be loyal to him.

He looked down and took a sip of tea to wash the sweetness that filled his mouth.

He naturally would not believe what he said.

But he also knew that at present, his identity was evident among the three. He issued a warning, and they also expressed their loyalty. At this point, further persecution was useless.

He needed facts to prove that Xu Du’s claim of loyalty was true or false. Until then, what he had to do was to find something that could restrain them or prevent them from betraying him.

Jiang Suizhou picked up his chopsticks again, as if the confrontation had not happened, and calmly talked to them about the letter he had received yesterday.

Xu Du and Gu Changyun also discussed the contents of the letter with him as if nothing had happened.

As with their last meeting, these two were methodical. They hit all the right notes and were quite insightful. When they proposed countermeasures, they usually hit the nail on the head. Their proposals coincided with the analysis Jiang Suizhou made based on historical data.

He gave off the impression that he really was the original owner, doing his best, without any reservations.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t tell if they were deliberately disguising themselves, or if they really didn’t care whether the person in front of them was the

original King Jing or not. But whatever the reason, the analysis they presented was desirable. Jiang Suizhou deliberated and wrote down the parts he thought were useful.

After finishing the meal and discussing the major and minor matters that happened in the past few days, Jiang Suizhou got up and left.

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Chapter 19.2

—— Although it was not a big deal to spend the night there, he was now a person whose real identity got exposed. If he were to stay overnight in the name of the original owner, it would be torturous just thinking about it.

The two men got up after him, saluted and sent him away.

It was not until the servants flanked Jiang Suizhou out of the courtyard yard that the two sat down again at the table.

Gu Changyun gently burst out laughing.

“He found out,” he said.

Xu Du gave him a disapproving look, “I warned you earlier not to tease him.”

Gu Changyun brushed him off.

“I just didn’t expect that he could be so perceptive,” he said. “But look, he didn’t get angry either, did he?”

Xu Du glanced at him. “Not necessarily,” he replied.

Gu Changyun laughed a few more times.

“Whatever,” he said. “I just want to see what this smart and soft-hearted new master will do next.”

——

Jiang Suizhou returned to Anyin Hall, but did not go back to the bedroom. Instead, he took advantage of the still early time to head to the study.

In addition to letters, there was plenty of other information the original owner stored in the study that could be examined. However, because it was extremely hidden and large in quantity, Jiang Suizhou had not thoroughly checked the information in the original owner's study until now.

Now, he had a suspicion in his mind and wanted to try to find out something from the information stored in the study.

This search lasted two hours, until about midnight.

He found an account book that the original owner had placed deep within his desk.

The account book was nothing special, but Jiang Suizhou found that the amount of expenditure on the account was very large. Each time, an account was issued on the 15th of the month, and the money was handed over to Xu Du by the original owner himself.

In addition to this, there was an expense in the book that fluctuated slightly each month, but the amount was insignificant.

The original owner shouldn't have kept records of such paltry sums. But since it was recorded in the book, the use of the money must be very important.

The date of the monthly disbursement was also the 15th.

Jiang Suizhou formulated a plan in his heart.

He brooded over it for a long time until Meng Qianshan came knocking on the door. He was here to remind Jiang Suizhou of the late hour and that he had to go attend the Grand Court Assemble the next day. Only then did Jiang Suizhou put the account book away and return to his bedroom.

By then, it was already deep into the night, and most of the servants had gone to bed early, leaving only a few on night watch.

Meng Qianshan opened the door of his room for him. When Jiang Suizhou stepped in, he found Huo Wujiu sitting under the lamp and reading a book.

He was frowning. One of his hands supported his forehead as he read through lines again and again. It appeared that he didn't quite understand the content of the book, and he seemed irritable.

Hearing the sound at the door, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and saw Jiang Suizhou taking off his cloak while walking indoors.

He shot a faint, obscure gaze which stopped on Jiang Suizhou.

…*Why is he back?*

Jiang Suizhou tossed his cloak to Meng Qianshan's hand. When he turned his head, he saw Huo Wujiu sitting there holding a book in one hand, as if he didn't see him.

Jiang Suizhou's heart inexplicably relaxed a bit.

Even if he was an idler in the Ministry of Rites, he still must guard against all his colleagues and always act like King Jing; when he returned to his residence, his two sharp-eyed aides were enough for him to deal with.

On the contrary, this Huo Wujiu, who was always indifferent to him, seldom spoke to him, and did not even give him a look, made him feel relaxed.

Under this atmosphere, a vague feeling of "returning home" even sprouted deep within Jiang Suizhou.

This thought made Jiang Suizhou give a self-depreciating sigh.

How much did he suffer that he actually found Huo Wujiu's face lovely?

Hearing him sigh, Meng Qianshan only thought he was tired and hurriedly supported him, guiding him to the back room to wash up.

When the two figures disappeared behind the screen, Huo Wujiu, whose gaze was fixed on the book, slowly raised his eyes and looked up.

…Must be difficult for him.

This morning, he heard Meng Qianshan say that “he went to Madam Gu’s place for you” and thought that the eunuch was muddled. But looking at how late at night it was, yet King Jing still rushed back, Huo Wujiu also felt that something was not quite right.

This man just purely wished to please him. Now, even his earlier concubines lost his favor, and he eagerly rushed back to sleep on the couch…

Huo Wujiu frowned, and his finger slowly tapped on the wheelchair.

Could it really be because of him?

He has never liked to owe others, whether materially or emotionally. Therefore, he especially hated it when others wishfully gave him something he didn’t need. He never appreciated it.

For example, King Jing.

Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze, lowered his eyes again, and looked at the book in his hand again.

This book was written by a great scholar of the Jing Dynasty. It was full of benevolence and morality, and the speech was long-winded. Huo Wujiu was already annoyed from reading the book, and King Jing’s sudden return should have turned his mood for the worse.

But upon reading this book again, Huo Wujiu’s brow inexplicably wrinkled up.

It seemed that this trite and fatuous great scholar had suddenly become less repulsive.

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Chapter 20.1

The next day was another Grand Court Assembly.

The thought of honoring the emperor made Jiang Suizhou deeply conflicted. After a hasty meal early in the morning, he went out.

To his surprise, just as he crossed the Zhengyang Gate, he bumped into someone head-on.

“What a coincidence, Your Highness Jing.” The man originally forced himself to smile, but because he was too ugly, he looked vicious. Moreover, he couldn’t hide the revulsion and malice in his eyes.

Jiang Suizhou took a quick look at him.

He was wearing the official uniform of a fourth-rank military official. He was around 30 or 40 years old, tall, and especially dark, with unkempt hair and beard. His round eyes trained on him were quite like Zhong Kui’s[1].

Jiang Suizhou took a quick glance at his court tablet.

Ministry of War, Ji Hongcheng.

Ah, so it was him.

The Lord Ji in front of him was so ugly that it was recorded in history books. Records written about him in the history of Jing claimed that he was “ugly.” Now, it seemed that…it was no exaggeration.

In ancient times, the preliminary round of imperial examinations also took into account the exam candidates’ appearance. If this Sir wanted to enter the imperial examinations to be an official, he naturally wouldn’t pass the

examination even if it took his whole life. He only became an official by relying on his military background. He was promoted by Lou Yue, the famous general of the Southern Jing.

This man's entire life passed through Jiang Suizhou's mind at railway speed.

His superior, Lou Yue, was an old friend of Huo Wujiu's father. When the Northern Liang army rose, the Emperor and the Empress dreaded him to the point where they did not even dare to let him fight with the Liang army. From this, it showed that Lou Yue and Huo Wujiu's father had a deep friendship. So, he believed that Ji Hongcheng's scowl directed at him was also partly because of Huo Wujiu.

Therefore, Jiang Suizhou coldly glanced at him. He did not speak, only walked around him.

He found Ji Hongcheng following him.

"I have heard that Your Highness is of good character. Now that I have seen you, it is indeed the case," Ji Hongcheng remarked.

Jiang Suizhou didn't bother to turn his head.

He heard Ji Hongcheng add, "After all, it's only when you browbeat the weak and the disabled in the harem that you show the true qualities of a gentleman, right?"

Anger coated his tone, and one could tell that he had held back for some time. This man probably had been holding a grudge against him since the last assembly and specifically waylaid him here today to tell him off.

This man was rather bold among the ranks, brave but lacked wisdom and tact. Now it seemed that this was indeed the case.

Fortunately, Jiang Suizhou was not the original owner and did not dare to do anything to Huo Wujiu. If the person who heard his words was the

original owner, Huo Wujiu's situation in King Jing's mansion would probably only worsen.

Jiang Suizhou turned his head back and gave him a faint look.

Ji Hongcheng was staring at him with copper-bell like round eyes, seemingly waiting for Jiang Suizhou to retort so he could pick a ferocious fight with him.

Jiang Suizhou smiled gently.

"I've troubled Lord Ji," he said. "This king's harem, naturally, is at my own disposal. Whether I want to kill, flay or defile someone, it's none of your business —— wouldn't you agree?"

——

The sight of Ji Hongcheng's face turning red with anger, him standing in place and unable to make a sound, improved Jiang Suizhou's mood. He turned around and walked away.

He knew that Ji Hongcheng had good intentions and was worried about Huo Wujiu, but he didn't mind railing against him and teaching him a lesson so that Ji Hongcheng wouldn't do such a disservice next time.

He walked all the way to the Guangyuan Hall.

When the hour arrived, drums were beaten. Then came the eunuch's singing cry.

Solemn silence and reverence settled outside the door. The ministers in the hall stood grandly, but the hall remained quiet, and no one appeared in sight for a long time.

The Emperor didn't show up.

Jiang Suizhou could not help but look around, but saw that the surrounding ministers appeared used to it. They quietly stood and waited.

Jiang Suizhou followed suit and waited.

This waiting actually lasted for a short half an hour, until the sun was high up in the sky. Jiang Suizhou's vision was a little blurry when the emperor entered leisurely.

"All of you arrived here so early, huh?" His Majesty slumped crookedly on the throne, yawning while lazily saying.

Jiang Suizhou scrutinized him and noticed that his eyes were dark, and his complexion was blue. He looked worn out. At a glance, it was due to overindulgence and excessive fornication.

The courtiers did not dare to say anything.

His Majesty then said, "Is there anything important today, Uncle?"

He directly addressed Pang Shao.

In the front row, Pang Shao smiled in response, and then opened his mouth to present memorials. In fact, he already made decisions regarding the big and small matters of the court. Every time he mentioned something, His Majesty just nodded and then had people follow Pang Shao's arrangements.

His Majesty didn't even ask in detail how much funds the Ministry of Revenue had to allocate in some of the issues he asked money for. He just instructed the minister of the Ministry of Revenue to allocate the money.

Jiang Suizhou frowned while listening. He wrote down the general matters and lamented that Southern Jing's extermination was really deserved.

Once Pang Shao finished presenting some memorials, a sparse line of courtiers also presented memorials. His Majesty heedlessly listened to them and then directly asked Pang Shao what to do. In the end, the issues presented by these ministers were handled according to Pang Shao's suggestions.

Footnote:

[1] Zhong Kui – a deity in Chinese mythology, traditionally regarded as a vanquisher of ghosts and evil beings.

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Chapter 20.2

Just then, His Majesty finally seemed to have woken up, and he sat upright on the throne.

“I heard two days ago that Fifth Brother moved General Huo to your courtyard.” Seeing that no one was presenting memorials anymore, His Majesty slumped back into the throne and asked slowly.

…*Here we go again.*

Jiang Suizhou stepped out among the courtiers and took out his prepared statement.

“Truth is, that man is restless in my harem and has injured the rest of my concubines. After thinking it over, I decided to put him by my side and keep an eye on him,” he said.

His Majesty propped up himself the throne and leaned forward. “But I also heard that since General Huo entered your harem, he has never left your bedroom?”

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and saw that the emperor’s eyes were shining, seemingly filled with the words “forbidden-domain.”

Jiang Suizhou was a little speechless, but still obliged and lowered his head. He held a fist against the front of his mouth with some embarrassment and cleared his throat.

His Majesty took it as a tacit admission of his speculation.

For a time, His Majesty roared with delight.

“It seems that I’ve decreed the right match, didn’t I?” He said, “Fifth Brother is very satisfied with General Huo!”

Jiang Suizhou held back his nausea and hurriedly explained along with his words, “That’s not quite the case…his wild nature is difficult to tame, so I can only use some tactics. Brother Emperor, please don’t mention it again.”

His Majesty discerned the relish in his tone and laughed heartily.

“Good, good, I won’t mention anything in Fifth Brother’s room anymore,” he said.

“However, in another half month, it will be my birthday banquet. Fifth Brother, there is no royal consort in your house, so why not let Madam Huo accompany you to the banquet?”

Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth.

Here we go again.

The last time he asked Huo Wujiu to enter the palace to “return to maternal home,” he rejected it for Huo Wujiu, but he didn’t expect that His Majesty would continue to persist on the matter. It seemed that he had to bring Huo Wujiu into the palace once before he would stop.

Jiang Suizhou was busy thinking of countermeasures, pondering for a moment, and did not reply for a while.

The look of distress on his face made His Majesty think that he was embarrassed again. In an instant, he became more spirited and smilingly said, “Fifth Brother, although I married him off to you, you shouldn’t keep your concubine in your love nest like this, you know? When everyone comes with their families by then, what will you look like alone?”

Before Jiang Suizhou could say anything, he saw His Majesty grin and ask, “Uncle, don’t you agree?”

Pang Shao echoed, “Your Majesty is right. I heard that His Highness’s two concubines, one from a brothel and the other a commoner, are not worthy to

grace your table, so how can they be brought before Your Majesty?”

The two echoed each other, making His Majesty all the more elated.

Jiang Suizhou pursed his lips. He knew that this time, he could not avoid it.

He paused and answered in a low voice, “This minister will comply with your decree.”

His Majesty beamed in response: “That’s more like it —— Alas, Fifth Brother, I don’t know what is so wonderful about men that makes you reluctant to part with them so much!”

He sighed with emotion and did not expect a reply from Jiang Suizhou.

But Jiang Suizhou felt suffocated this time. Upon hearing his sigh, he raised his eyes to him and breezily said, “As for the mystery, Brother Emperor will know once you try it.”

Hearing his words, the emperor subconsciously looked at him, and his gaze swept over the court of men.

They were all middle-aged and old men, with wrinkles all over their faces. Among them were a few particularly ugly, such as that big man, Ji Hongcheng. He was dark and tall, and was quite conspicuous in the crowd. From a distance, he was as ugly as a ghost.

His Majesty was rendered speechless for a moment and felt his stomach churn a bit.

——

Ever since His Majesty ascended to the throne, his annual birthday has become the most important banquet of the year for the Jing Dynasty. Not only should the banquet be held extravagantly, but the ceremonies before the banquet should also be held with the grandest pomp; so half a month in advance, the Ministry of Rites became busy.

After Jiang Suizhou left the court, he rushed to the Ministry of Rites and did not return until nightfall.

The lights flickered, and an invitation was placed on the table in front of Huo Wujiu.

It was sent by a court official named Chen Ti. Huo Wujiu had no impression of this person, but he was probably young and with a low official post.

Chen Ti invited Huo Wujiu to his residence in a month's time for a flower appreciation banquet hosted by his wife.

The handwriting on the letter was pretty regular script in lower case calligraphy. There was a layer of fragrance floating on it, which was undoubtedly used by the ladies for socializing.

Without having to think about it, Huo Wujiu knew that this person was trying to please others and had invited him there specifically to humiliate him.

These people, however, had always been proficient at packaging such ugly thoughts magnificently —— They pretended to be ignorant of Huo Wujiu's original identity and who he was. Instead, they regarded him as the beloved lady in King Jing's mansion and wrote a letter to him, as if they really wanted to invite him to enjoy the flowers together.

Huo Wujiu knew that as a prisoner, he should be able to endure any humiliation. But the incense on the letterhead drifted to his nose and still made him irritable.

Just then, Sun Yuan came in from outside. He saw that Meng Qianshan was not beside him, and hurriedly stuffed a thin object into Huo Wujiu's hand.

It was another letter.

The envelope was not signed and was discreetly folded tightly, resembling the letter sent by Ji Hongcheng a few days ago.

It had only been a few days. What kind of secret news was there to send him?

Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze and opened the letter.

Then a line of extremely scrawled, angry words jumped to his eyes.

[King Jing is shameless and really inhumane!]

Huo Wujiu gave a start, and the irritation that was suppressed in his heart dissipated somehow. Even an untraceable arc rose in the corners of his lips.

He moved his hand and turned the letter to the next page.

He was a little expectant. He wanted to see what inhumane words His Highness Jing had said during the court today.

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Chapter 21.1

Ji Hongcheng's tone was utterly brusque. From the letter, Huo Wujiu figured that Ji Hongcheng wrote it for Jiang Suizhou's eyes.

After all, even if Ji Hongcheng was stupid, he would not believe that his letter could be delivered to Huo Wujiu so easily, especially right under Jiang Suizhou's eyes.

In the letter, he detailed the evil deeds of Jiang Suizhou this morning; from the time he met Jiang Suizhou to the impudent remarks Jiang Suizhou made in the court. Ji Hongcheng castigated each of them at length.

Because he was a military official with little culture, his emotions got the best of him, and he wrote several crude profanities in the letter that couldn't be spoken in public.

The letter was used to scold Jiang Suizhou.

The corners of Huo Wujiu's mouth involuntarily rose as he read on.

He did not expect that His Highness, King Jing, who was careful in front of him and had to deliberate on his words for a long time, would be so arrogant behind the scenes. He was so self-confident in his righteousness to the point of lying to all the civil servants of the court.

He said he defiled him? And that he used some "tricks" because his wild nature was untamed?

Huo Wujiu's fingers involuntarily rubbed the edge of the letter slowly.

He suddenly wanted to see what Jiang Suizhou looked like when he blatantly said these words.

Sun Yuan, who was standing behind him, was alarmed.

Beneath the candlelights, he didn't know what Madam Huo read, but the curvature of his mouth actually stretched wider and wider. He was born cold and sharp, so his smile at this moment was rather like a wild beast in the dark, ready to pounce and bite off his prey's throat.

Huo Wujiu quickly finished reading the letter.

But then, Sun Yuan saw him pause. He glanced up to the beginning of the letter, and carefully read it again.

…*Huh?!*

Sun Yuan even thought for a moment that what he had sent to Huo Wujiu was a secret letter to assassinate the present emperor.

—— Otherwise, how could he be so interested?

…*Should I notify His Highness?*

Just then, the candle flame on the table jumped slightly, and some footsteps sounded faintly outside the window.

Jiang Suizhou has returned.

Sun Yuan also heard the faint sound. He quickly stepped forward, took off the lampshade for Huo Wujiu, signaling him to quickly burn the letter.

Huo Wujiu brought the letter to the lamp, but stopped when the fire was about to lick the edge of the paper.

Sun Yuan looked at him in surprise.

He witnessed Huo Wujiu pause and actually take back the letter.

He folded the letter again and put it into his sleeves.

His behavior struck Sun Yuan dumb.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes to him, his gaze quiet and indifferent. The curvature of his lips also disappeared.

“Why are you standing frozen there?” He asked.

His eyes were pitch-black and deep, as if they could dig out a person’s heart and see through it. Sun Yuan was stupefied, but he hurriedly reattached the lampshade amidst the sound of approaching footsteps.

——

It was already very late at night when Jiang Suizhou returned to his house.

The morning court session had exhausted him enough, and he was busy at the Ministry of Rites. By the time it was dark, he was already drifting a bit on his feet.

Fortunately, Ji You knew that he was unwell, so he did not make things difficult for him. Ji You transferred a large part of the work that Jiang Suizhou should have been in charge of to his disciples.

Because of this, Jiang Suizhou was able to return home at this time.

He rode all the way back to the courtyard in his palanquin. He felt parched as he entered the door heavy-headed. Sitting down at the table, Jiang Suizhou asked Meng Qianshan to pour him tea.

Meng Qianshan noticed his pallor, so he quickly brought the teacup into Jiang Suizhou’s hand. He bowed and asked, “How are you, Your Highness? Shall I send someone to call the doctor to check your pulse?”

Jiang Suizhou waved his hand and when he spoke again, his voice was hoarse and was a bit breathless. “No need.”

He felt dizzy and exhausted at the moment. Instead of asking the doctor to toil until midnight, he should just rest earlier.

Meng Qianshan complied uneasily and retreated to the side.

Jiang Suizhou took a few sips of tea, moistened his throat, and felt much better.

He put the cup back on the table and was about to get up to wash, when he saw an envelope on the table.

It looked beautiful and exquisite, like a love letter from a girl to her crush.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but be a little curious. “Who sent this letter?”

Meng Qianshan had brought this letter to Huo Wujiu today, so he knew the content of the letter. Once Jiang Suizhou asked, it was as if Meng Qianshan had found a place to complain, so he quickly stepped forward and cut in, “Your Highness, it’s from Mrs. Chen, Lord Chen Ti’s wife!”

Chen Ti?

Jiang Suizhou frowned.

Although he was only a fifth-rank official, he was a distant relative of Pang Shao’s. He was not much else, but was an expert at toadying for personal gain. He was the best at kissing Pang Shao’s ass, so he was making a good living in the capital.

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Chapter 21.2

What was the purpose of his wife sending a letter to Huo Wujiu?

Seeing that Jiang Suizhou frowned and did not say anything, Meng Qianshan added, “This letter is for Madam Huo.”

Jiang Suizhou looked at Huo Wujiu, and saw him faintly lift his eyelids.

“Flower Appreciation Banquet.” Huo Wujiu’s voice was low and calm.

Flower appreciation?

Jiang Suizhou opened the envelope, pulled out the letter. There was a letter of invitation inside inviting Huo Wujiu to go to his family’s back courtyard in a month’s time to enjoy the flowers.

Jiang Suizhou frowned deeper and deeper, and before finishing reading the letter, he stuffed the letter with the envelope into Meng Qianshan’s hand.

All of them were bad news.

That fatuous emperor and those bunches of bootlickers in the court were entirely to blame for why the Jing Dynasty was on the verge of collapse.

They were plagued with leisure all day long and didn’t know how to enhance national strength against Northern Liang. On the contrary, they were obsessed with finding ways to humiliate the captive of the enemy country.

The emperor forced Jiang Suizhou to let Huo Wujiu take part in the palace banquet earlier this morning, and now there was an insignificant official also strutting around to have fun with Huo Wujiu. Jiang Suizhou was

already tired, and the irritation that he had accumulated throughout the day burst out uncontrollably.

He rarely displayed his anger, but his tone even contained a thin layer of it. “Send it back to where it came from.”

Meng Qianshan was startled: “Your Highness…”

Jiang Suizhou swept him a sidelong glance: “What? I don’t want him to go see the rubbish flowers in his garden. Is there a problem?”

Meng Qianshan shook his head repeatedly, and even though he had some reservations, he did not dare to say anything.

But at that moment, Huo Wujiu spoke up.

“Pang Shao must have authorized him to do so, and they will not rest until they achieve their goal.”

Jiang Suizhou was about to pick his teacup on the table, when he heard the low voice out of the blue. He moved with a start and looked at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu remained seated in his wheelchair, and when he saw Jiang Suizhou staring at him, he quietly continued. “They are targeting me. It’s none of your business,” he said.

Huo Wujiu knew that since he was in Southern Jing, such things would definitely not be rare. He was lucky to escape once or twice before, all because Jiang Suizhou defended him behind the scenes.

For every time Jiang Suizhou held them off, that group of people would take the opportunity to rip a piece of flesh off of him. How many valuable things could King Jing have on him that would be enough to keep them at bay in front of him?

He did not want to be this shrinking tortoise, nor did he want to let another person be a shield for him.

After saying these words, he distinctly felt Jiang Suizhou's stunned gaze. This made Huo Wujiu's heartbeat inexplicably skip a couple of beats. Huo Wujiu hastily averted his gaze and did not look at him again.

He hoped King Jing wouldn't think too much of it. He just wanted to clarify that he could do without Jiang Suizhou's self-sacrificing goodwill…

But then he heard Jiang Suizhou's hoarse voice sink.

"None of my business?" He sneered. "You're married to me. How can it be none of my business? Is it not my dignity that's trampled upon when you, a big man, mingle with women to enjoy the flowers?"

After saying this, Jiang Suizhou went to the back room to shower.

As he walked out, he was still inwardly cursing.

If you let me live and don't cut off my head after three years, then it's naturally none of my business!

Of course, he knew that Pang Shao was behind the little official who dared to send such a letter to his palace. As for why Pang Shao supported him —— it was naturally because this move would please the emperor very much.

Of course, Pang Shao was also more than happy to see it.

During this period, that group of people tortured Jiang Suizhou, and he learned how to understand their tricks. In any case, if he could stop something, he would stop it. If he couldn't, he would put it off for a later time.

With that decision, Jiang Suizhou cleaned up and took a bath, before coming out of the back room.

He was exhausted from the day. Once cleaned, he felt as if he was treading on air from the fatigue. He just wanted to fall into bed and get a good night's sleep.

But as soon as he returned to his bedroom and was about to go to his couch, he found Huo Wujiu sitting on his couch, quietly reading a book.

…What is he doing?

Jiang Suizhou was a bit confused and stopped in his place.

Huo Wujiu heard his footsteps and raised his head. He pointed in the direction of the bed with his chin, poker-faced.

“Go sleep there.” His tone was crisp and sharp, as if he was giving orders to his soldiers.

Jiang Suizhou was a bit overwhelmed. He looked in the direction of the bed. He saw that the bed was neat and tidy. Moreover, there was a pill on the low table next to the bed.

“And the medicine on the table, eat it.” Jiang Suizhou heard Huo Wujiu say.

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Chapter 22.1

Jiang Suizhou decided that Huo Wujiu wasn't going to poison him to death.

But…Why was he giving him medicine?

He looked at Huo Wujiu suspiciously and stood motionless for a while.

Right at that moment, a breeze blew in from the open window. It was perceptibly a refreshing warm breeze, but it swept the water vapor on Jiang Suizhou's body and made him cough violently.

He had a hacking cough, probably because his immunity was already poor. Plus, he was drained today, so his body was even weaker.

When he stopped coughing a few moments later, his voice was hoarse, and his eyes were covered with a layer of mist.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes in a daze, and through the hazy mist, he found that someone had closed the window.

Huo Wujiu sat under the window reading a book, without raising his eyes.

Jiang Suizhou regulated his breathing before sheepishly heading to the bed and sitting on the edge of it.

…My bed, so comfy!

The bed was spacious; the quilt was thick; the material used was also thick and soft. The mere touch of it made him feel like half of his soul was going to sink in.

Jiang Suizhou was somewhat moved. After all, since his arrival in this world, he still hadn’t experienced what it was like to sleep in bed.

His original intention of excusing himself and letting the handicapped person return to sleep in the bed was thus forsaken.

——Since Huo Wujiu gave it to him, it would be fine for him to sleep for a night. He wasn’t a bully.

With this in mind, he lifted the quilt. As he moved, the tiny object placed on the table caught his eyes again.

His eyes fell on the medicine on the table.

What kind of m-medicine was it?

Jiang Suizhou was totally uncertain. He looked at the medicine, and then looked at Huo Wujiu who did not say a word.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t really want to eat it. After all, he didn’t even know what it was. But he also knew that even if Huo Wujiu wanted to poison him, he would not use such a direct method.

What if Huo Wujiu was well-intentioned, and Jiang Suizhou upset him because he didn’t eat it?

After weighing his options for a moment, Jiang Suizhou still believed in Huo Wujiu’s character and ate the medicine before laying down on the bed.

It was so comfortable. How could there be such a thing as this bed?

Jiang Suizhou was so tired and dizzy that he pulled the covers over him and disappeared into dreamland.

He did not see Huo Wujiu, who was sitting on the couch, quietly staring at him after he drifted off to sleep.

…He looks shrewd, but he dares to take the medicine given by an enemy without knowing what it is.

The medicine he put on the table was exactly the one he brought out of prison. This pill was the most beneficial for boosting qi and blood. He took one in prison when he was disoriented from the pain, hanging on for dear life. A month down the road, he had a few pills left in his hand. Last time, he also used two pills to intimidate Doctor Zhou.

He saw that Jiang Suizhou had fallen into a deep sleep on the bed.

…He's a bit stupid.

Huo Wujiu raised his hand and extinguished the candle flame at the table.

For a time, the bedroom fell into a quiet darkness, leaving only the window paper blowing in the breeze, quietly drumming.

Huo Wujiu glanced at the window.

…I wonder how he turned so weak like this. A gust of wind that I didn't even feel could blow the man straight into a coughing fit and cause him to cough up tears.

Jiang Suizhou was in such a condition, yet he was still thinking of protecting him?

——

When Jiang Suizhou woke up the next day, he felt refreshed, feeling like he had never slept so well before.

He didn't know if it was because of him finally sleeping in a bed or because of the medicine Huo Wujiu gave him. Regardless, Jiang Suizhou woke up this day, feeling that his breath was a lot lighter.

However, the affairs of the Ministry of Rites still needed to be completed.

Jiang Suizhou has studied the ritual system of the Jing Dynasty. He knew how cumbersome it was, but never imagined it to be troublesome to this extent.

It was all because of the emperor’s lavish extravagance.

Recently, due to the need to compare various details, Jiang Suizhou had obtained the previous birthday banquet book records of the emperor.

When the emperor held a banquet in the first year of his accession to the throne, it was less than a year after the death of the former Emperor, and the palace in Lin’an was only half built. It was a time of war and chaos, and the treasury was empty. But even then, the emperor’s birthday banquet was extremely extravagant, twice as much as the previous emperor’s customs.

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Chapter 22.2

In the past two years, Southern Jing gradually settled down in Lin’an, and the specifications of the banquet also rose every year.

Consequently, the Ministry of Rites was also thrown off their feet.

Under such circumstances, even though Jiang Suizhou received a lot of care from Ji You and did not have to work until midnight, he was still only able to return to his house on time, not early. And even so, when he returned to the house every day, he was still so tired that he felt like he was walking on air. He felt dizzy, and he was so sickly that he wished he could throw himself down.

However, he rested well every day.

Huo Wujiu seemed to have forgotten that the bed was his turf. Every day when Jiang Suizhou wanted to rest, Huo Wujiu would take the couch so that Jiang Suizhou could sleep on the bed.

Jiang Suizhou wanted to remind Huo Wujiu every day to switch back with him, but he was so beaten every day and the bed was so comfortable that he put off the idea again and again.

Because of this, although Jiang Suizhou was tired during this period, he slept soundly every night. When he got up the next morning, he was more or less recharged and wouldn’t be really burnt-out.

To a certain degree, this credit was all due to Huo Wujiu. Even when Jiang Suizhou looked at Huo Wujiu every day, he felt that the latter was quite pleasing to the eye.

He also gradually formed a delicate balance with Huo Wujiu.

The two of them still had little communication, but because they lived in the same courtyard, they would have two meals together every morning and evening. After they finished eating, if it was early in the day, they would stay on their respective side in the bedroom, each doing their own thing.

It was quite peaceful.

This lasted until the 15th of the month.

Although Jiang Suizhou was busy, he still kept in mind the account book that he found in the study.

On the morning of the 15th, he called Meng Qianshan aside as soon as he had eaten breakfast.

“Have you brought back the account book for this month?” He asked in an unclear and meaningful way.

Of course, he fooled Meng Qianshan. Hearing him ask, he hastily took out a thin piece of paper from his bosom.

“It was only delivered last night, so I thought I would give it to you when you return from work today,” he reported with a smile.

Jiang Suizhou took the account and saw that the details were noted in it, which consisted of the entire diet and living expenses of a family of two in a month. Because these two people never went out, their expenses were very little. There wasn’t much money spent a month down the line.

Jiang Suizhou glanced at Meng Qianshan and said, “This month’s expenses are a little less.”

Meng Qianshan replied, “Is it? That young lady doesn’t spend much money, and the old lady’s wind chill has been treated. Hence, she doesn’t even need money for medicine.”

Jiang Suizhou paused, then tried: “That’s good. If they need to spend money for something, there’s no need to save. These two people are important and must be taken care of.”

Meng Qianshan immediately took the bait.

He smiled naively, nodded repeatedly and echoed, “Don’t worry, Master. I will save you the trouble! I will definitely not let Madam Gu’s family suffer an ounce of hardship!”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

…Madam Gu?

Unexpectedly, the original owner had actually detained Gu Changyun’s family in the house in order to make him obey him.

It was no wonder that among these two people’s expenses, there were no travel expenditures. On the contrary, a huge amount of money was spent on the hiring of guards. It was no wonder that Gu Changyun didn’t resent him a tiny bit even after testing him. It was as if he didn’t have any master-servant relationship with the original owner…

Jiang Suizhou paused and put the account book away.

“It’s good that you know.” He gently nodded, then turned around and walked out.

He finally got to the bottom of Gu Changyun’s details. Now, he desperately wanted to know in what way Xu Du was brought under the original owner’s command.

He had not forgotten that on the 15th day of every month, he had a money exchange with Xu Du. From this, he might be able to get a glimpse of Xu Du’s bottom line.

After returning from the Ministry of Rites tonight, he needed to make a trip to Xu Du’s courtyard.

While Jiang Suizhou internally devised plans, he walked out of the courtyard and entered the palanquin parked outside the courtyard.

There were still a bunch of chores waiting for him at the Ministry of Rites, and he also obtained important news about his staff at this time. So many things occupied his mind that he forgot to tell Meng Qianshan that he would not be returning to the courtyard for dinner this evening.

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Chapter 23.1

Night fell.

Jiang Suizhou busied away at the Ministry of Rites until it was completely dark. Afterwards, he returned to the royal residence.

He didn’t forget about Xu Du’s matter and went to Xu Du’s courtyard as soon as he returned.

Gu Changyun didn’t know of his visit beforehand, so he was absent —— This was precisely Jiang Suizhou’s purpose for not informing him. There were some things that he needed to discuss with Xu Du in private.

Xu Du had just prepared dinner in his courtyard, and when he saw Jiang Suizhou, he acted very calmly, asking the serving maids to add a set of bowls and chopsticks, and then dismissing them all.

Once the servants withdrew, only the two of them were left.

Xu Du’s residence was quite quiet, with bamboo shadows swaying outside the window and the fragrance of ink lingering in the room. There was a chess game on the table in front of the window, with an unsolved game on top.

Jiang Suizhou sat at the table and looked at Xu Du, and saw Xu Du smiling gently.

“Master actually knows that there are matters to be handed over to me on the 15th of every month,” he said. “I am not as resourceful as Changyun, and was thinking of what method to use to see you in case you were unaware.”

Xu Du said this bluntly, laying Jiang Suizhou's identity on the table.

Jiang Suizhou didn't dodge the accusation. Relying on the lack of audio and video equipment in ancient times, he stated outright, "There are a number of records in the study from which I glimpsed a clue or two from, and know that I have a transaction with you today."

Xu Du froze, not expecting him to be so blunt.

"I have only seen this kind of spirit possession in books since childhood. I never imagined that this speculation was true," he said slowly.

Jiang Suizhou gave a faint smile: "I didn't want to be here either. It was a coincidence, so I really had no choice."

Xu Du laughed.

"It is fascinating. Witnessing this unheard-of phenomenon makes my birth and walk in life worthwhile," he said.

Xu Du acted open-minded and natural. Jiang Suizhou looked at him for a moment and said, "Now then, I still don't know what the scheme with you is."

Xu Du smiled and asked, "Which aspect of the plot is Master talking about?"

Jiang Suizhou replied, "You already know. Although I became King Jing, I am not him. You all have your own purposes for being his wingmen. I know now that Gu Changyun's family is under duress, so what about you?"

A momentary surprise flashed across Xu Du's face.

"Master even found out about this?" Xu Du asked.

Jiang Suizhou regarded him quietly.

After a while, Xu Du burst into laughter and nodded.

“It’s indeed because of this for Gu Changyun. His parents died early, so he, his grandmother and younger sister depended on each other. At that time, our Master approached him, but he did not want to get involved in the strife of the court, so our Master used some tricks,” he said. “Unexpectedly, you’re so astute that you even discovered this.”

“What about you?” Jiang Suizhou asked him.

Xu Du paused and raised his eyes to look at him, his gaze clear and bright.

“I come from a merchant background and had no way to enter the officialdom,” he answered, “But I aspire to be part of the country’s annals. All I want in life is fame and fortune.”

Jiang Suizhou knew that the Jing Dynasty had just started the imperial examinations, and the requirements for the family background of those who entered the service were extremely strict. Within the five categories, as long as you were a merchant, opera singer, or prostitute, you were barred from participating in the examination.

Jiang Suizhou paused and then asked, “So, you then joined King Jing’s command?”

Xu Du laughed a couple of times.

“I’m a nobody, and apart from His Highness King Jing, who is in a tight spot, I really had no other means,” he said.

“Moreover, although I want to achieve fame and fortune, I shouldn’t stoop to low levels. If I join Pang Shao’s sect, won’t I have to do something that will leave a dirty mark for years to come?” He stated frankly.

Jiang Suizhou believed 80% of his words. He pondered for a moment and asked, “So, what is the money given to you on the 15th of every month used for?”

He knew that the credibility of a person’s words depended on his actions. Whether Xu Du was honest with him or not depended on these important

matters.

Jiang Suizhou quietly looked at Xu Du, then saw him turn around. Xu Du went to the hidden compartment in the bookshelf and took out an account book. He returned to the table and handed it to Jiang Suizhou.

“His Highness has saved up money over the past few years and raised a batch of dead soldiers,” he informed. “There are a few with a total of ten or so. Since dead soldiers need to be personally trained for many years before they can be used with confidence, His Highness sought me out and handed the matter of raising and training dead soldiers to me.”

Jiang Suizhou was inwardly surprised, but nothing showed on his face as he took the record and flipped through it carefully.

He committed each man’s serial number and expenditure to memory, along with the date. The detailed notes in a month accumulated into a thick book.

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Chapter 23.2

“So, you always go out for fun every month, and you always go out on the street to buy paper and pens, but I never let you report it?”

Xu Du smiled and nodded: “Your Lordship is indeed wise.”

Jiang Suizhou quietly read the account book, while Xu Du waited on the side without rushing him. After a long time, Jiang Suizhou put down the account book. He took out the money he had prepared and gave it to Xu Du according to the amount in the account book.

This was to tell Xu Du through his actions that he trusted him.

Xu Du smiled and reached his hand out, taking the silver bills.

“You have done extremely well,” Jiang Suizhou commended. “There are still many places where you can be used in the future.”

Xu Du smiled lightly. “Master, just give me the order.”

After a moment, Jiang Suizhou looked up at him: “But, have you ever thought about the future?”

Xu Du did not say a word and tilted his head, indicating him to continue.

Jiang Suizhou spoke unhurriedly.

“Rise and fall is a natural law,” he began, “If a dynasty’s days are numbered, and another rising sun gradually ascends, how can you obtain the fame and fortune you want?”

When Xu Du heard this, he did not say anything for a long time.

After a spell, he laughed, clear and crisp.

“Everyone is convinced that the division of the two dynasties into the north and the south of the river is a foregone conclusion and will last for hundreds of years —— Under these circumstances, even if Northern Liang still has Huo Wujiu, it will not change. Why do you think that the Southern Jing’s days are numbered?”

Jiang Suizhou asked, “Why was Huo Wujiu captured?”

Xu Du replied, “He faced the enemy alone, and his reinforcements were cut off.”

Jiang Suizhou continued, “Then, what about the Southern Jing’s court now?”

Xu Du faltered and then laughed, “Master is saying that Huo’s defeat is because his horse tripped, and Jing’s defeat is because its foundation is rotten?”

Jiang Suizhou’s silence was his tacit approval.

Xu Du was rendered speechless for a while. Then he stood up and gave a deep salute to Jiang Suizhou. “In this dire straits, I originally didn’t have much hope, but I’d like to wait and see. Every step is a last resort,” he said. “But now, it is my good fortune to have met a wise master. I’m sure my Lord already has plans for what the future holds. I will follow your orders and be your right arm.”

Jiang Suizhou paused and was momentarily tongue-tied. Xu Du had spoken to him and was willing to believe in him, which was naturally good. But the hat that Xu Du put on him was too high, which made him vacillate for a while.

What about the future? What were his plans?

He just knew that in the near future, they would be wiped out by Huo Wujiu in one go.

———

Silence reigned in Anyin Hall.

Dinner time had passed, but their Master had not returned.

Meng Qianshan was so anxious that he paced around, and at every turn, he sneaked a glance at Huo Wujiu.

Meng Qianshan saw Huo Wujiu sitting at the table quietly reading a book. He didn't know if it was his illusion, but he felt that even after half an hour, Madam Huo still hadn't turned a page of the book in his hand.

Meng Qianshan sent someone to ask.

A few moments later, a young servant sprinted back all the way into the main house and ran to Meng Qianshan, panting.

"Eunuch Qianshan, His Highness has gone to Madam Xu's room," he reported, "A maid in Madam Xu's courtyard just came to report, saying that His Highness hadn't left instructions in advance. As soon as he returned to the house, he headed straight there."

Aigoo! How can this be!

This servant reported in the room while Madam Huo was sitting nearby, hearing everything clearly. Now, even if Meng Qianshan wanted to contrive a lie to coax Madam Huo, it was impossible.

Meng Qianshan waved his hand quickly and drove the servant out.

When the servant retreated, Meng Qianshan mustered up a flattering smile on his face. He went to Huo Wujiu's side and told the maid beside him: "Why are you so thoughtless? The dishes are all cool, so why don't you go heat them up…" He swallowed the rest of the words in his belly.

Madam Huo, who was sitting there, put down his book without looking up. He picked up his chopsticks and used them to take food from the cold dishes.

He ate the meal alone.

Meng Qianshan felt an indescribable feeling for a moment.

…It wasn't just the roomful of servants who were waiting for His Highness's return for the meal. Madam Huo, who usually ignored His Highness, was actually also waiting to eat with him.

Moreover, Madam Huo was obviously…totally unhappy at the moment.

If so, Meng Qianshan knew that only the mischief maker could undo his mischief. Madam Huo's spirit was a little low at the moment, and this was something that servants like them couldn't handle. They could only wait for His Highness's return from the dinner, and then personally coax this ancestor.

With this in mind, Meng Qianshan warily served Huo Wujiu until he finished his meal. He, however, never imagined that after dinner, His Highness still didn't return.

Until a long time later…a maid from Madam Xu's place arrived.

"Eunuch Qianshan, His Highness will rest at Madam Xu's place today," said the maid.

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Chapter 24.1

Jiang Suizhou rested at Xu Du’s place purely because he was bone-tired for the day.

He had been very busy at the Ministry of Rites. After he returned home, he had a showdown with Xu Du, so he ate merely a few bites of the dinner.

When the dinner was cleared, and he was ready to leave, he had a dizzy spell when he stood up, making him almost plunge to the ground.

Xu Du held him up.

“Your Highness is weak, so you mustn’t overwork,” Xu Du advised.

Jiang Suizhou steadied himself and took a few breaths before he regained his strength. He propped himself up on the table with one hand and waved his hand feebly. “Because of His Majesty’s birthday banquet, the Ministry of Rites is busy day in and day out.”

Xu Du helped him sit on a couch. He then turned around and lit up the soothing incense. He said, “Yes, at this time every year, the court is very busy. Should I send someone to ask the mansion doctor to come and check you out?”

Jiang Suizhou shook his head.

“No need,” he declined. “A troubling round trip will only tire unnecessary people.”

Xu Du nodded. “Indeed. Then I’ll ask someone to brew a calming soup for Your Highness —— Why don’t you rest here today?”

His proposal was reasonable. After all, the back courtyard was far away from Anyin Hall, and there was a vast garden in between. Wherever Jiang Suizhou went, he had to ride in a palanquin. It was inconvenient to walk around the garden in a palanquin, so he had to take a detour.

Enduring a bumpy ride while the wind blew was too tiring.

Jiang Suizhou was moved, but then suddenly thought of something and hesitantly asked, “Do you have an extra bed in your room?”

Xu Du smiled: “Don’t worry, Your Highness. There is a Bisha cupboard[1] in the room. Changyun usually comes to stay here and sleeps there.”

Hearing that both of them had beds to sleep on, Jiang Suizhou nodded in relief.

So long as there was a bed to lie in, why should he care where he slept?

So, that night, he rested in Xu Du’s room.

——

Jiang Suizhou did not sleep well that night.

He didn’t know if the ink fragrance in the room was too light, or if the bed Xu Du used to sleep on was a bit hard. In short, Jiang Suizhou felt like something was missing in the room.

He tried to sleep, but kept waking up all night long. When he got up in the morning, the soles of his feet were like stepping on cotton, and underneath his eyes were a little blue.

There was also a Grand Court Assembly today.

The moment Jiang Suizhou rose from the bed early in the morning, his head felt heavy and his feet light. He was also groggy.

He was a bit chagrined. If only he hadn’t been lazy last night and gone back to sleep in his own courtyard.

Meng Qianshan was waiting outside the courtyard early in the morning.

Meng Qianshan didn't deliver him his court uniform because he had to go through the front courtyard to get out of the house from here anyway. Jiang Suizhou had a casual breakfast at Xu Du's place and went back to Anyin Hall.

When he entered the door, he found a tall and straight figure sitting at the table in the main hall.

The bright daylight elongated his shadow until it touched the ink bamboo painting hanging in front of the hall. He was akin to a sharp blade chopping into the depths of the bamboo forest.

It was Huo Wujiu, having his breakfast.

Jiang Suizhou crossed the threshold and saw Huo Wujiu eating by himself, sitting straight and upright, with no intention of paying attention to him.

This kind of cold treatment was all too familiar to Jiang Suizhou. It was so familiar that it felt a little homely, which dissipated a bit of his irritation for having a troubled sleep all night.

He didn't fuss about Huo Wujiu, nor rush to greet him. He only acted as if he didn't see this man, and then let Meng Qianshan support him as he bypassed Huo Wujiu to change his robes in the inner room.

While walking, Meng Qianshan also rambled and complained, "Master, did Madam Xu serve you well yesterday? I find Your Highness's complexion terrible…"

Jiang Suizhou immediately interrupted him when he heard this. "Shut it," he ordered.

Meng Qianshan repeatedly nodded.

Jiang Suizhou paused and said, "The window paper in Xu Du's room is a bit old, so ask someone to go there later and see if there are any items that need to be changed. Replace them with new ones."

The window papers were indeed in disrepair. Whistling wind blew in all night. Although other people could not feel it, Jiang Suizhou suffered from it. When he got up early in the morning, his nose felt clogged.

Meng Qianshan again repeatedly nodded.

The two talked while heading to the inner room.

Jiang Suizhou did not see that the moment he walked around the screen, Huo Wujiu raised his head and frowned at his back.

His footsteps were unstable, and his eye bags were blue. He looked exhausted at a glance.

Usually, even if Jiang Suizhou slept all night on the couch, Huo Wujiu had never seen him in such a tired state.

If he got this exhausted overnight, what else could have caused it?

Huo Wujiu inexplicably felt that the chopsticks in his hand were unmanageable. He could hardly use them to pick at a dish, and the force on his hand inevitably rose a few degrees heavier.

He tried hard to focus on the food on his plate, but it didn't work.

Jiang Suizhou's appearance just now kept popping up in his mind. He obviously only took one glance, but it got deeply imprinted in his mind. It hooked him so hard into guessing what Jiang Suizhou had done last night.

The chopsticks in Huo Wujiu's hand seemed to have grown a blade, because he shredded the sauced beef in sauce in a couple of strokes.

Footnote:

[1] Bisha cupboard – first used as a shelter from the summer heat.

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Chapter 24.2

However, he still couldn’t pick it up and over to his plate

He was a bit chagrined and put the chopsticks down on the table.

He was in a bad mood this morning and filled his head with nonsense surely because he didn’t sleep well last night.

After all, he had never suffered the symptoms of insomnia before. Whether it was the wind and sand whistling like wolves howling in Yangguan, or the ice and snow covering and freezing his armor and flesh, he had always slept peacefully.

It was only here, when there was just one less person at night, that he actually couldn’t fall asleep.

…It’s all about that King Jing.

The sick man, who could hardly breathe after only taking a few steps by himself, didn’t return to his room to rest, but had the energy to fool around in his concubine’s room?

Didn’t he say that he fell for him and that he couldn’t bear to put his hand on him? He called on someone else in his harem, and on the contrary, withstood it very much. When he returned afterwards, he was still thinking about changing window papers for others.

What a plausible liar, with a mouthful of nonsense.

King Jing was indeed a deceitful man.

———

Jiang Suizhou changed into his court uniform early in the morning and left in a hurry.

Courtiers weren't allowed to bring attendants when they entered the palace, so Meng Qianshan sent Jiang Suizhou all the way to outside the palace gates and returned to Anyin Hall to serve the expressionless "favored concubine" who was sitting rigidly upright.

This master was usually silent, and he did everything by himself. He was easy to serve. But today…Meng Qianshan felt that something wasn't quite right.

As for what was wrong? Meng Qianshan also couldn't pinpoint it.

This master normally didn't like to talk, and he didn't utter a single word today, either. He usually just sat in the corner reading by himself, and today was the same. Nothing was different from the usual.

But Meng Qianshan always felt…that the air pressure in the house today was particularly low.

This made him uncomfortable. He just felt breathless, like a flying insect that could not find a place to go and could only fly around the room.

After careful consideration, Meng Qianshan inwardly reasoned that although Madam Huo wasn't fond of His Highness, he had thrown a tantrum from yesterday to today. Hence, there was no harm in pleasing this master and making him happy.

With this in mind, Meng Qianshan cautiously walked to Huo Wujiu's side and stepped forward.

"Master, it's a perfect day today. Shall I accompany you to the garden for a walk?"

Sun Yuan, who was waiting by Huo Wujiu's side, heard the words and looked up at the sky outside the window, which was gray and cloudy.

Lin’an in the spring was rainy, and the sky had been cloudy for a while now. Therefore, there was no such thing as perfect weather.

Sun Yuan looked down and saw Huo Wujiu looking at his book, not saying a word.

Meng Qianshan knew that as long as this master made no objection, it meant that they were allowed to do whatever they wanted.

Meng Qianshan was as happy as if he had received an imperial decree and hurriedly gave Sun Yuan a glance. “Your master wants to visit the garden. Why don’t you move faster?”

Sun Yuan promptly pushed the wheelchair and followed Meng Qianshan out of the courtyard.

The layout of King Jing’s residence was exquisite, and Anyin Hall was in the best location in the mansion. After leaving the courtyard and turning south, they entered the garden of the residence.

The former owner of this garden was rich and sophisticated. There were 18 scenic spots in the garden, each of which had its own wonderful view and exquisiteness.

Meng Qianshan had been serving here for three years and could walk through this garden with his eyes closed. Now that he was bent on pleasing Huo Wujiu, he went into a long, vivid monologue about the scenery everywhere they went.

However, Huo Wujiu never applauded his performance.

He sat in his wheelchair with a cold face without responding in the slightest. He was rather like a deaf man who could not hear a sound.

Sun Yuan, on the other hand, pushed his wheelchair and listened with gusto. He looked wherever Meng Qianshan pointed and sometimes couldn’t help but click his tongue and marvel at the beauty, earning looks of daggers from Meng Qianshan.

However, Sun Yuan had always been a bit dense and failed to register Meng Qianshan's displeasure. He just followed and enjoyed the sights.

They strolled through the garden until they crossed a stone bridge and went to a bamboo forest.

"Madam, look! That is the 'Youhuang Tingquan'[2] in the mansion! That is not only a bamboo grove. After we cross the bridge and walk to that forest, you can see…"

Just then, Meng Qianshan's rich eloquent voice came to an abrupt halt.

Sun Yuan did not understand, but he quickly followed his gaze.

In the middle of the bamboo forest, there was a gurgling stream and a winding path. An open-air chess couch was set under the hundreds of green bamboos with a stone-carved chess board, which was very elegant.

Right at this moment, two people were sitting on top of the chess couch.

One was dressed in red, and the other in a green robe. They were playing a game in the grove.

Meng Qianshan was so annoyed that he called upon his ancestors, wishing to slap himself in the face. He slammed the brakes under his feet and grabbed Sun Yuan's shoulder, forcing him to make a U-turn on the narrow and delicate stone bridge.

"…I remembered it wrong! It's but a ruined bamboo grove. There's nothing to see. It's a dead end in front. Turn around, and let's go to another place…"

But at that moment, the ancestor in the wheelchair, who had been silent, spoke up.

"Isn't there a Tingquan?" He said. "Why are you turning around? Keep going."

The deep, cold voice sounded like it was squeezed out of his lips.

Qianshan almost kneeled before him.

You ignored me the entire way, but you were actually listening to me!

Meng Qianshan quickly bowed down in an attempt to persuade this ancestor not to “listen to the springwater”, but the moment he bowed, Huo Wujiu’s side profile hit him straight in the eye.

Meng Qianshan saw that Huo Wujiu’s cold and sharp pitch-black eyes were devoid of his usual indifference and lack of interest, and was instead as sharp as a falcon’s, looking straight ahead.

For a moment, Meng Qianshan felt that this man was on the battlefield, with thousands of soldiers and horses behind him. Huo Wujiu’s eyes were burning like torches, as if in the next second, he would take off the head of the enemy himself.

Meng Qianshan followed his eyes.

…*This ancestor was looking at Xu Du.*

Footnote:

2 Youhuang Tingquan – a bamboo grove where you can listen to the sound of spring water

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Chapter 25.1

Meng Qianshan did not dare to disobey, so he signaled Sun Yuan and pushed the wheelchair forward with trepidation.

He tearfully shouted in his heart: *Madam Xu, run away.*

However, the two concubines obviously did not receive the signal he sent with his divine sense. When they heard the sound of the wheelchair, they looked up. Both of them remained calm and composed, waiting for them to approach.

Huo Wujiu in the wheelchair swept the two with a cold glance.

He had a little impression of the red-clad man. He took after a lady, and his hands tended to wander. The first time they met, he reached out to touch his face.

The other one…

Huo Wujiu's eyes sharpened a bit coldly.

Was he the one who mediated the last time they met? He twisted the claws of the man in red, and it was this man who methodically stepped forward to persuade and send someone to fetch the mansion doctor.

…So King Jing likes someone like him?

Huo Wujiu coolly withdrew his gaze, and there were shades of disdain in his eyes that begged to disagree.

In their barracks, the most annoying thing was this kind of scholar who would waste time chirping and smoothing things over. Just listening to

people like him could make his head spin. However, considering King Jing's questionable character and his poor taste, it was normal for him to take a fancy to a man like him.

Huo Wujiu fired a cold shot deep inside without realizing that he had included himself, whom King Jing had "secretly admired for many years", in the scope of his attack.

He took a single glance and then withdrew his gaze. He looked upon them frostily, and hadn't had the slightest intention of greeting them.

It was Gu Changyun who smilingly spoke first.

"The last time I saw this Madam Huo was some days ago, right?" With fox eyes as soft as silk, he looked Huo Wujiu up and down for a good while. "The feng shui of our King Jing Mansion is just nourishing. Look at you, Madam Huo. You look much better."

Xu Du faintly glanced at him.

He knew that before the fall of Gu Changyun's family, there were several concubines in his father's house. Gu Changyun had been influenced since childhood and knew the way of fighting in the harem. When he came to King Jing's residence, he especially loved to perform this tart play in front of outsiders.

He usually didn't take up much of a fight, so he thought Huo Wujiu wouldn't take him up on it either.

As expected, Huo Wujiu didn't say a word, but Meng Qianshan at the back bowed smilingly and said, "Of course! After Madam Huo came to the mansion, everything was fine. Thank you for your concern, Madam Gu!"

While speaking, Meng Qianshan secretly elbowed Sun Yuan and smilingly continued, "I didn't know that the Madams were playing chess here. I'm slow-witted and disturbed your good mood…Sun Yuan, why aren't you bidding goodbye to the Madams?"

Sun Yuan heard his cue, and obediently bowed to the two right away.

However, before he could say the words of farewell, Gu Changyun interrupted him with a smile.

“What’s the hurry?” He said, “Coming and going like that. Meng Qianshan, am I a man-eating tiger?”

Xu Du glanced at him.

He had advised Gu Changyun many times not to fool around, but he also knew that Gu Changyun had experienced great ups and downs in his early years, and had developed this temperament of playing with the world and teasing everyone he met without fear of death. It was something that couldn’t be easily changed.

Seeing that Meng Qianshan smiled after he was asked, Xu Du opened his mouth and said, “If you have no important matter to attend to, there is no hurry to leave. Does Madam Huo know how to play chess? If you do, why don’t you come and see how to break this game?”

Huo Wujiu glanced at him. He hated playing chess the most.

His father was a stinky chess player, but his military advisor was a national Go player. Since Yangguan was remote, his father did not want to let go of any resources to educate him, so he forced him to learn chess from that smiling tiger master.

Huo Wujiu was so impatient with the uninteresting black and white pieces that he always messed up, and was so angry that his father confiscated his favorite Dayuan[1] horse as blackmail to force him to learn.

Just because he knew how to play didn’t mean he liked it.

Huo Wujiu’s cold eyes swept over Xu Du in front of him.

A talkative mud stick, the boring black and white chessboard, and the provocative annoying one gathered together.

When Sun Yuan, who was behind him, heard Xu Du's words, he looked left and right, not knowing who's order to follow. Then he saw Huo Wujiu raising his hand, signaling Sun Yuan to wait in place.

Sun Yuan hurriedly did as he was told. He watched as Huo Wujiu rolled the wooden wheel of the wheelchair and approached the chessboard by himself.

Xu Du looked at him.

Huo Wujiu sat beside the chessboard with his eyes faintly drooping. He swept a glance around the game, and without half a second thought, he stretched out his hand, picked up a black piece and landed it on the board.

Xu Du froze.

However, Huo Wujiu didn't give him a chance to speak to him. After landing that piece, he withdrew his hand and pressed it on the wooden wheel. After he gave a push, the wheelchair turned around and drifted straight away.

"Go," he said.

Sun Yuan immediately pushed him on, while Meng Qianshan hurriedly saluted the two and followed.

Gu Changyun watched them all the way until they went far away, then he said to Xu Du with a surprised look on his face, "Look at that, he's worthy of being a general. Even if he was locked up in the back courtyard, he's still this wild and rude. He cares for nobody."

But Xu Du remained silent and didn't say a word.

Footnote:

[1] Dayuan horse- known as heavenly horses

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Chapter 25.2

Gu Changyun heard no response from Xu Du, so he turned his head to look at him. He saw Xu Du staring at the chess game on the board, expressionless and lost for words.

Gu Changyun smiled and teased him, and followed his gaze to the chess board: “What’s so captivating about this chess board? It’s just…”

His speech came to an abrupt halt.

On the board, Xu Du’s white piece had forced his black piece into a desperate situation, but after Huo Wujiu’s piece had settled, the black piece, like a trapped beast, bit down on the white piece’s throat.

The situation on the board had turned tables. The black piece recovered from its losing position and was gaining momentum.

Gu Changyun froze and laughed.

“He’s quite good at chess, huh?” He said.

Xu Du, however, shook his head.

Just now, Huo Wujiu dropped that piece and raised his eyes to look at him when he withdrew his hand.

His deep and cold black eyes, akin to the black chess pieces, were raging and ruthless; they were so cold that it made him feel like he had plunged straight into a cold pool.

For a moment there, Xu Du felt a chill down his back. It was as if Huo Wujiu wanted to kill all the white pieces on the chessboard.

A moment passed, and he shook his head.

Gu Changyun asked, “What are you thinking about?”

Xu Du stayed silent for a moment.

“Nothing,” he said, “I just wonder…when did I provoke General Huo?”

——

After noon, it drizzled a bit.

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes were blue underneath. After the morning court session, he wearily rushed to the Ministry of Rites again.

Even though Ji You had taken great care of him, he couldn’t just do nothing. Today, seeing that Jiang Suizhou looked terrible, Ji You took a look at the early morning sky outside and asked him to go outside the city to inspect a batch of materials needed to decorate the venue.

Ji You smiled and told him that after he had made an inventory according to the account book, Jiang Suizhou didn’t have to return to the Ministry of Rites; he could just have the carts carrying the materials driven to the courtyard of the Ministry of Rites.

Jiang Suizhou knew that Ji You was deliberately letting him off the hook so that Jiang Suizhou could return to his house early after his official work.

He was very grateful. He not only thanked Ji You for his gentle nature and being a good man, but also thanked himself for shooting his mouth that day and chatted with Ji You more.

However, after he left the Ministry of Rites, the rain fell heavier and heavier.

Just as he left the northern city gates, someone came to report that the carriage transporting the materials had gotten stuck in the mud ten miles outside the city and could not get free.

Now, that was a good deal of torment.

The rain outside the city was worse than in the city, plus Lin'an roads were muddy outside. After the emperor arrived in Lin'an, he utilized what little money he had left in his hands to repair his own imperial city and had never considered repairing the roads.

Thus, the materials that could have been delivered in the afternoon didn't make it to the city gate until it was dark.

Jiang Suizhou tagged along in the damp and cold wind outside the city for a whole day. When the caravan arrived, he had to command his men to count the goods and clean up the mud.

By the time he returned to the royal residence, it was already the second night watch[1].

He ate something for dinner outside the city. When he returned to the house, he felt so tired that he could barely open his eyes. The moment he completed a little cleaning, he fell asleep.

Meng Qianshan carefully waited for Jiang Suizhou to lie down on the bed, and then raised his eyes to look sideways.

Madam Huo was sitting on his wheelchair next to the couch by the window. He lowered his head and quietly flipped through the book in his hand.

Meng Qianshan roughly remembered that Madam Huo usually would not sleep so late…was it because the book he was reading was particularly interesting, and not because he was waiting for the King?

Meng Qianshan didn't dare to ask, he just walked out quietly.

The door to the room closed.

The book in Huo Wujiu's hand rustled to another page.

In the book, a poor talented scholar climbed over the courtyard wall of the Prime Minister's house and had a private tryst with a beautiful young lady

under the moon. The young lady shyly handed him a silk handkerchief that she had embroidered herself, but the scholar grasped her soft hand…

Huo Wujiu's eyes fell on the page, but his gaze was empty.

He was halfway through the book, but he didn't even understand what kind of book he was reading.

A moment later, he raised his eyes and glanced in the direction of the bed.

Jiang Suizhou was lying there, seemingly asleep.

Huo Wujiu's fingers slowly crumpled the pages of the book.

From the time he finished his evening meal alone at nightfall today, he was inexplicably annoyed, so annoyed that he couldn't register a single word.

Huo Wujiu only thought that this irritation came from his legs.

The injuries on his legs were gradually healing, but he hadn't been able to feel anything. It wasn't until a few days ago when the sky began to turn gloomy that he felt a twinge in his legs.

But it was a vague tingling pain from the damaged meridians in his legs.

The pain was different from the severe pain of being cut. It wasn't too severe, but felt more like a dull knife scraping his bones. But because that pain wasn't all that intense, a few days down the road, Huo Wujiu also did not suffer from it.

Until it rained today.

The dampness was provoking, and it was as if his injuries had sensed something. It affected his meridians all the way to his lumbar spine, and produced a bone-eating kind of pain.

Huo Wujiu quietly endured it.

Footnote:

[1] Second night watch – 21:00-23:00

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Chapter 25.3

However, something was strange. He sat quietly with his book, but whenever footsteps came in or out, he would subconsciously concentrate and listen to the sound of those footsteps.

He didn’t know what he was waiting for, but every time he listened, irritation rose deep in his heart.

Occasionally, he heard Meng Qianshan sending other servants out to ask when Jiang Suizhou would return. Multiple servants were sent several times, only for them to return saying that the king was busy.

Huo Wujiu frowned without a trace.

It wasn’t until the sound of rain outside the window diminished and the hour-glass struck the second night watch that Huo Wujiu finally heard the particular sound of footsteps.

It was somewhat floaty and not at all fast. As soon as it fell into Huo Wujiu’s ears, he knew that Jiang Suizhou had returned.

He lowered his eyes and turned a page of the book.

Was he not going to spend the night at his concubine’s today?

An inaudible cold snort escaped from Huo Wujiu’s lips. The irritation that had accumulated all night in his heart dissipated little by little with this sneer.

Even the corners of his mouth were raised in an arc.

However, Jiang Suizhou did not talk to him today, and after cleaning up a bit, he fell asleep on the bed.

Now that no one was around, Huo Wujiu finally raised his head. His gaze quietly fell on him.

Sick man. It was only yesterday, but after spending the night with that wimp and mud stick, you ended up this sapped. You're this weak, yet you still want to fill your harem aplenty?

You're going to get yourself killed.

Such a sickly man should be content with his lot and be protected under his wings. He should be kept in a safe house, away from the elements. He wouldn't let him suffer, and would never let him give birth to those flowery thoughts that would, in turn, attract others.

These thoughts actually made Huo Wujiu's heart beat faster. It was as if the thoughts kindled something that made his heart itch a little.

He stiffened, quietly withdrew his gaze, and picked up the book in his hand again as if trying to squash something.

[Zhang Sheng clutched the soft and beautiful hand of the woman. It felt so soft and boneless that it made his heart and soul flutter. He found that a rosy tint had flown up to the lady's cheeks. Her eyes blinked timidly, and as the saying went…]

… *What kind of messy books did Meng Qianshan find!*

He threw the book aside.

The person on the bed was startled by the light clatter, and his shoulders trembled.

Huo Wujiu heard the slightest sound and looked at the person on the bed who was wrapped tightly in the blanket. He appeared startled, but didn't wake up. He just turned over and continued sleeping.

…How strange. When Jiang Suizhou slept in the past, I have not seen him wrapped so tightly under the quilt.

Huo Wujiu frowned, then heard heavy breathing from the bed, which sounded more strenuous than usual.

Could it be that he was sick?

Huo Wujiu didn't really want to care and was too lazy to cause trouble. He thought he'd better call Meng Qianshan in.

But his hands seemed to rebel against his command. He clearly should have maneuvered his wheelchair toward the door, but he inexplicably went straight to Jiang Suizhou's bedside.

The man on the bed was wrapped tightly, and only his dark, silky hair could be seen scattered across the pillow.

Huo Wujiu hesitated and stretched out his hand to touch Jiang Suizhou's shoulder through the quilt.

The man was thin and so were his shoulders. Even through the heavy quilt, Huo Wujiu easily enveloped it with one hand.

Huo Wujiu didn't have to exert much effort to turn him around.

…His face is abnormally pale. He's shaking, and his breathing is quivery.

His eyes were tightly closed, and there wasn't much blood on his lips. His eyelashes fluttered, and his breathing was labored.

When Huo Wujiu saw his extremely fragile appearance, he froze. And then, as if he was electric shocked, Huo Wujiu hastily let go of his shoulder in fear that he would hurt him.

Then, he raised his hand somewhat clumsily and placed it on Jiang Suizhou's forehead.

…I think this is how to test whether a person has a fever, right?

The temperature under his hand wasn’t hot at all; instead, it was cool. He was probably frozen and hadn’t warmed up yet.

Huo Wujiu wanted to withdraw his hand and leave to call Meng Qianshan in.

But at that moment, a cold hand strenuously stretched out from under the blanket and grabbed his hand.

It was ice-cold and soft, and entirely frail, yet Huo Wujiu’s hand froze in place.

“Don’t go” The man’s voice in the bed shook. He was clearly lying on his bed, but he sounded as if he had fallen into an ice cave, shivering and holding a life-saving straw.

Huo Wujiu heard Jiang Suizhou’s chattering voice.

“Don’t tell my mom. I’ll be fine after a good night’s sleep,” he said.

Huo Wugou didn’t know who this “mom” was, but he could hear fear and confusion in Jiang Suizhou’s almost inaudible voice.

Jiang Suizhou sounded scared of making trouble.

Huo Wujiu paused and somehow grasped Jiang Suizhou’s hand back.

His bony hand was quite long and slender. Huo Wujiu effortlessly wrapped the thin and weak hand into his.

The unconscious Jiang Suizhou on the bed seemed to have found a heat source. He sighed softly, and actually struggled to pull that hand closer.

The next moment, a cold and delicate cheek pressed against the back of Huo Wujiu’s veiny hand.

——

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Chapter 25.4

After Jiang Suizhou laid down, he lost consciousness in a trance.

He seemed to be wrapped up in a chaotic dream, with the time and world jumbled.

One moment, he was back to his childhood when his half-brothers from unknown mothers pushed and bullied him in their father's mansion. He went to his mother with his grievances, but through the door, he saw his mother sitting alone in the room crying silently, as if she had lost her soul. It made him timid and afraid to share any of his grievances.

The next moment, there was the disgusting smile of the emperor, and a bunch of courtiers he had only seen in portraits. They were staring at his every move with various expressions, making him nervous, fearful, and reluctant to speak out.

A moment later again, Huo Wujiu was holding a bloody knife in his hand. His eyes were as cold as the day Jiang Suizhou took off his veil. Huo Wujiu was staring at him as if he would immediately cut off his head and take it to the city walls to air-dry.

Jiang Suizhou wanted to run, but his legs were rooted in place. He watched as Huo Wujiu drew nearer and stretched out his blood-stained hand at him…

Jiang Suizhou simply closed his eyes tightly and waited for death, but unexpectedly, Huo Wujiu did not kill him.

…*He actually reached out and touched my face.*

Jiang Suizhou only thought he was trying to figure out where to bury his knife on his neck, and he touched his face because it was crooked.

But to his surprise, Huo Wujiu's hand pressed against his face and wouldn't let go.

Jiang Suizhou also woke up groggily at this time.

Like in a dream, he was muddled, and his body was burning. He opened his eyes in a daze and could only see a candle flame swaying, so bright that he could not open his eyes.

Hl body felt unbearably heavy. He slowly inhaled and choked out a hoarse cough before he could speak.

"Master!"

It was Meng Qianshan's voice.

Jiang Suizhou had a coughing fit that blurred his eyes. Just then, something he was holding in his hand suddenly gripped his hand.

It was quite cold and very strong, and a hand pulled him to sit up.

Then, another other hand fell on his back, slowly patting him until his cough gradually eased.

Only then did Jiang Suizhou open his eyes that were blurred by tears.

He saw Meng Qianshan kneeling in front of his bed and lying on the edge of the bed under the bright lights. His eyes were red with anxiety, and he was staring at him closely. His mouth quivered, but he didn't dare to make a sound.

Also, he was holding a large, bony and veiny hand in his own hand.

Jiang Suizhou was feverish, and his brain was sluggish. When he saw the hand, he froze and looked up at the arm of the hand.

Then he met a pair of cold, dark eyes.

Jiang Suizhou was so scared that he let go of the hand.

Huo Wujiu calmly stopped patting him on the back and pulled a pillow behind him. He pressed him down and had him lean on it. He then turned his head and said in a low voice, “You’re awake.”

A young doctor hurriedly came forward, knelt down in front of the bed, and took Jiang Suizhou’s pulse.

Huo Wujiu rolled his wheelchair back and retreated.

No one noticed that his right hand which Jiang Suizhou had just held was placed in his lap. He slowly curled his fingers and clenched his fist.

As if retaining some kind of touch.

When the people around them saw that Jiang Suizhou had woken up, they stopped what they were doing and gathered around the bed.

The doctor diagnosed his pulse for a moment, got up and said, “His Highness is weak and overworked. The dampness and cold invaded his body, and he is suffering from windchill. I have boiled the medicine outside. In a moment, let His Highness drink it and have him go to bed. I think his fever will get better early tomorrow morning. He just needs to rest in the house for a few days. He shouldn’t go anywhere until his windchill is gone.”

Meng Qianshan replied repeatedly beside him and ordered a maid nearby to bring the medicine quickly.

Jiang Suizhou leaned on the soft pillow and rubbed his temples painstakingly before he roughly digested the words of the doctor.

…Oh, so I’m exhausted. It rained today, and the cold made me sick.

It was already spring, and the rain was not cold. There was probably no one else except him who would catch a cold without getting caught in the rain

this season.

Jiang Suizhou sighed in resignation.

However, that was also good news. He was sick, so he could rest peacefully in the house for a few days. He wondered if he could stay sick for a longer period, preferably until the emperor's birthday banquet. That way, he could peacefully claim to be sick and not attend. Huo Wujiu naturally wouldn't have to go as well…

Reminded of Huo Wujiu, Jiang Suizhou's muddled brain paused.

Just now…was he h-holding Huo Wujiu's hand?

But he did not have the slightest impression of how Huo Wujiu came to his bedside, and how he took his hand with him.

Jiang Suizhou felt that he was really sick and confused.

However, before he could delve deeper into it, an extremely domineering bitterness drifted in from afar.

Jiang Suizhou frowned in the wake of it.

Then he saw a bowl of medicine soup as dark as ink. It was filled in a white jade bowl and brought to him.

The bitter taste wafted to the end of Jiang Suizhou's nose and immediately triggered a cough. The coughing caused a dry retching in his throat, which scared Meng Qianshan to pat his back and call out to his master repeatedly.

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Chapter 25.5

When the coughing stopped, Jiang Suizhou turned his head.

Before he transmigrated, he particularly disliked drinking Chinese medicine, but he didn’t expect that ancient Chinese medicine tasted even worse than modern ones.

Meng Qianshan discerned the refusal in his reaction and said bitterly, “Please, Master. You’d better drink this medicine!”

Jiang Suizhou held his breath and said nothing.

The medicine was right in front of him. He was afraid that if he took one more breath, he would choke and lose half his life.

Meng Qianshan was so anxious that he was about to cry.

“Master! If you don’t take the medicine, how can you recover from this illness?!”

Jiang Suizhou froze.

…*That’s right.*

If he didn’t take this medicine, he wouldn’t get better, right?

If he was ill…would he be justified not to take Huo Wujiu to the emperor’s birthday banquet?

——

Since that day, Jiang Suizhou had rested in the mansion as a matter of course.

Many courtiers from top to bottom of the court sent him gifts of sympathy, and even the emperor rewarded him with an imperial doctor, grandly in the name of diagnosing and healing him.

Jiang Suizhou knew that the emperor was afraid that he was pretending to be sick, so he sent someone to take a look.

But Jiang Suizhou was indeed seriously ill. The imperial doctor also went back and reported that His Highness King Jing's body was really unfit for anything. The next spring rain would probably drench off half his life. The emperor was so happy that he rewarded Jiang Suizhou with a pile of worthless gold, silver, and jewels the next day. He allowed Jiang Suizhou to take a good rest, and he didn't have to worry about anything in the court.

Ji You from the Minister of Rites also heard that Jiang Suizhou was down with a cold and became ill because of the assignment he assigned to him. That day, Jiang Suizhou asked Meng Qianshan to bring a letter to Ji You. Ji You was so guilty that he asked Meng Qianshan to bring back several books of unofficial history as his apology.

Jiang Suizhou was between tears and laughter. He asked Meng Qianshan to quickly put those faulty books away and store them somewhere he couldn't see.

The next day, his fever went down, but he still hadn't recovered from his wind chill.

Jiang Suizhou had never been so uncomfortable with a cold.

The original owner must have had a particularly weak respiratory system. When he caught a cold, his throat and lungs felt extremely uncomfortable. Because of his poor health, his illness has always recurred these days. His body was as cold as ice one moment, and he would be suffering from a low fever the next.

Jiang Suizhou was viciously tormented, but did not forget to secretly ask Meng Qianshan whether they should move Huo Wujiu out, so as not to infect him.

This was just an excuse. Jiang Suizhou wanted to use this excuse to move Huo Wujiu out.

After all, the emperor and Pang Shao were now thoroughly convinced that he was gay. They even thought that he was a gay with a penchant for some excitement. If that was the case, there was no need for him to keep Huo Wujiu in his room and let him sleep on the couch every day for nothing.

But Meng Qianshan shook his head repeatedly.

Hearing Jiang Suizhou's words, he smiled so broadly that he ended up with a toothy grin.

"No need, Madam Huo doesn't mind this." He relied on the fact that Huo Wujiu was not in the room at the moment and whispered his reply to Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou frowned.

Meng Qianshan said, "You might not know this, but the day you fell ill, it was Madam Huo who discovered it. From the time the servant came in, Madam Huo kept holding your hand and didn't let go until you woke up!"

Speaking of this, Meng Qianshan was already laughing ecstatically.

Jiang Suizhou was a bit speechless.

He had an impression that perhaps…, it wasn't Huo Wujiu who was holding his hand, but him holding onto Huo Wujiu and refusing to let go.

However, even if he shared these thoughts, Meng Qianshan would not believe it. Even if Huo Wujiu was deprived of his martial arts skills, he could definitely remove himself from a sick man with a fever such as him, right?

Then he heard Meng Qianshan smilingly continue, “Master, I think Madam Huo treats you somewhat…Ah! No difficulty is indeed insurmountable if you’re sincere. Sincerity can make metal and rock crack!”

Jiang Suizhou maintained his composure and drove him away.

Sure enough, once you tell a lie, you will pay for it sooner or later.

Looking at Meng Qianshan’s triumphant backside, Jiang Suizhou gritted his teeth and shook his head. He could only put away the thought of moving Huo Wujiu out for the time being.

Although his illness was recurring, he was getting better day by day.

Initially, the emperor had sent an imperial doctor, but there was no more movement after that. Then, unexpectedly, another imperial doctor from the palace came within a few days.

This time, Jiang Suizhou saw the obvious difference in this doctor.

The one that the emperor sent before only diagnosed his pulse. When he saw that Jiang Suizhou was seriously ill, he bade farewell and left.

But this doctor was different. After he came, he gave Jiang Suizhou a detailed diagnosis. He even clearly checked what medicine Jiang Suizhou had eaten in the past few days.

Jiang Suizhou guessed that this imperial doctor was 80% sent by Pang Shao.

The emperor merely wanted to see Jiang Suizhou fall ill. Since he really was ill, the emperor was happy and didn’t care about him anymore. But Pang Shao was different. He was keeping an eye on Jiang Suizhou to see how he was, to see when he would get well, and to see if he could take advantage of it to pull other tricks.

Jiang Suizhou was dead tired of this kind of surveillance.

But he couldn’t drive this imperial doctor away. He came once every few days.

Until today.

It was the third visit of the doctor. After diagnosing Jiang Suizhou, the doctor smiled meaningfully and said, “Your Highness has recovered well. I think you’ll be well in two or three days. Just as well, the emperor’s birthday banquet is in four days’ time. His Majesty has been concerned about you every day. Now that you can attend, His Majesty will not be disappointed.”

After saying that, he raised his head and left.

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Chapter 26

Jiang Suizhou sat on the bed. He was so furious that his breathing was unsteady.

He knew that this was Pang Shao threatening him. Pang Shao was telling him that he knew about his health condition, that he could not escape, and that he must bring Huo Wujiu to the palace to amuse and entertain the emperor.

At this very moment, Meng Qianshan came in with the boiled medicine.

Jiang Suizhou took a look at the medicine, and then turned his eyes away.

For this period, he felt that he had soaked in bitter medicine, and there was a bitter taste all over his body.

He might as well not drink this medicine and continue to stay in poor health instead. If worse came to worst, he'd just stay sick for a few more days. It was better than having those people get their way and subject Huo Wujiu to humiliation again.

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou said to Meng Qianshan, "Put it down. I will drink it later."

Meng Qianshan watched him cautiously.

He knew that his master was not in a good mood at the moment, so he assumed that he lost patience drinking medicine. However, Jiang Suizhou was quite proactive in drinking medicine these recent days, except the first time, so Meng Qianshan didn't express his refusal.

Meng Qianshan was at ease with him. Hearing him say so, he put the medicine aside obediently and withdrew.

Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu were the only two people left in the room.

Jiang Suizhou glanced at Huo Wujiu, and saw him sitting quietly alone at a distance, looking down at a book.

He got off the bed and picked up the medicine on the low table next to him.

Unbeknownst to him, when Huo Wujiu nearby heard the noise, he immediately raised his head and looked at him.

He saw the oblivious Jiang Suizhou wearing thin bedclothes and carrying the medicine bowl with one hand. His pace was a little slow as he walked towards a purple sand clay pot with an ornamental tree in the corner.

Jiang Suizhou thought that as long as he poured out his medicine for two days to ensure the recurrence of his old disease, he could only be carried there if they wanted him to attend the emperor’s birthday banquet.

With that in mind, he walked over to the purple sand clay pot and tipped the jade bowl over.

But when he was about to pour the medicine down, a hand suddenly reached over and took hold of his wrist.

Jiang Suizhou looked back and saw that Huo Wujiu appeared next to him at some point.

He sat in his wheelchair and clamped a hand on Jiang Suizhou’s wrist to prevent his hand from moving. Although Huo Wujiu was looking up at him, his sharp black eyes were cold and awe-inspiring.

His gaze made Jiang Suizhou’s heart inexplicably guilty.

“What are you doing?” He heard Huo Wujiu ask.

Jiang Suizhou got a grip of himself and replied coldly, “Mind your own business. Get out of the way.”

Huo Wujiu didn’t let go.

“Drink it.” The declarative sentence came out of his mouth, especially like an order.

“Are you talking to me?” Jiang Suizhou took out his fierce bearing typically used toward Meng Qianshan. His countenance turned chilly, and he looked arrogantly down at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu didn’t make a sound, but the force of his hand increased. He yanked Jiang Suizhou’s hand inch by inch, holding his wrist and forcing him to bring the medicine back to the front.

Huo Wujiu was using his actions to order him to drink the medicine.

The bitter taste blew against Jiang Suizhou’s face.

Jiang Suizhou frowned at the fragrance and looked down. Huo Wujiu looked cold and tough, as if he wasn’t leaving him any room for discussion.

For some reason, Jiang Suizhou’s heart was flooded with grievances.

He was well aware that the emperor loathed him. Since he came here, he had suffered quite a bit of humiliation and had been enduring it for long.

He also knew that being sick was unbearable. During this period, he suffered terribly every day from his illness. In all his life, he had never been so sick for so long and so serious.

For him, rather than being so ill, he might as well let the emperor have a taste of his quick tongue.

What was he afraid of? Wasn’t he afraid that the ancestor in front of him would be humiliated and put it on his account and then offset it with his life?

Jiang Suizhou laughed coldly.

“General Huo, why do you think I’m dumping the medicine?” He asked.

Huo Wujiu did not make a sound and only quietly held his wrist, confronting him with silence.

Jiang Suizhou continued, “You heard what that doctor said just now, right? Why does he always come to see me and remind me of that? It’s because the emperor ordered me to bring you to attend his birthday banquet. He wants to see you.”

It had been a long time since Jiang Suizhou said such long sentences in a row that he was out of breath. After he spoke, he choked and coughed a few times. He forbeared and then added, “Why does he want to see you? You don’t need me to say it, do you? Although I don’t want to care about it, I don’t want to humiliate myself in front of the officials. Dumping this medicine and letting me stay sick for a few days is beneficial both for you and me. Do you understand?”

After speaking, Jiang Suizhou took a few labored breaths to even out his breath.

He lowered his eyes to look at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked at him indifferently. He listened to him finish his speech, but his expression remained extremely calm.

It was only after Jiang Suizhou smoothed out his breathing did Huo Wujiu speak quietly.

“I know,” he said, “So, drink the medicine.”

Jiang Suizhou’s eyebrows knitted.

He found that Huo Wujiu’s deep black eyes were firm and quiet.

He was obviously unable to stand up anymore. He was in an enemy country and a prisoner of war that everyone had trampled on, but those eyes were

somehow reassuringly powerful to Jiang Suizhou.

“They won’t kill me, so I have nothing to fear. If he asks me to go, then I’ll just go,” he said.

After a pause, Huo Wujiu spoke somewhat stiffly and awkwardly. “So, don’t be afraid either.”

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Chapter 27

…Don’t be afraid?

This was the first time Jiang Suizhou heard someone say such a thing to him.

He didn’t know where Huo Wujiu got his confidence. Even if he was considered a War God that killed gods and Buddhas, he was now just a clay statue. Any hot-tempered person with rough hands and feet could smash him to bits.

However, when these words came out of his mouth, they sounded extremely convincing. For a while, Jiang Suizhou felt that Huo Wujiu was really trying to keep him safely behind him.

Jiang Suizhou was a bit overwhelmed for a while.

Under his grip, Huo Wujiu felt Jiang Suizhou stop struggling. When Huo Wujiu looked up, he found that the man’s expression was still cold, but his eyes were a bit empty.

He couldn’t help but sigh deep inside.

This man; he was obviously harmless, but he just had to wear the mask of a vicious tyrant.

He let go of Jiang Suizhou’s wrist and took away the jade bowl he was holding in passing.

Only when Jiang Suizhou’s hand was emptied did he snap back to his senses.

He found that Huo Wujiu had taken his bowl away, and was now holding the medicine in one hand. He raised a pair of cold, calm eyes and regarded him quietly.

“Go back to bed.” He heard Huo Wujiu speak.

His tone was still brusque and cold, quite like giving orders to his soldiers.

That was when Jiang Suizhou realized that he was wearing only thin pajamas with his ankles exposed.

It was not too cold in early spring, but it was much for his sickly body to endure. In just a while, he was completely frozen.

Jiang Suizhou could only return to the bed and sit in embarrassment.

Huo Wujiu rolled his wheelchair with one hand and moved to the bedside. He placed the medicine bowl on the low table beside him.

Huo Wujiu put down the medicine, but did not leave. When Jiang Suizhou looked at him, he saw Huo Wujiu looking at him indifferently. Although he was silent, his stance told him that he was waiting to see him drink the medicine before withdrawing.

Jiang Suizhou secretly gritted his teeth.

…Are you the King or am I?

In any case, Huo Wujiu was only a concubine. His arrogance was evidently an offense to his superior.

Jiang Suizhou muttered his grievances in his heart, and pursed his lips. He took the medicine bowl, tilted his head and drank it.

…It’s bitter as hell.

——

Jiang Suizhou’s illness had really been cured.

After that day, he also thought it through. Anyway, Huo Wujiu had already known what the emperor wanted to do and also said he was not afraid. No matter how the emperor courted death, it was none of Jiang Suizhou's business.

After all, what he really feared was that Huo Wujiu would settle accounts with him later. With this arrangement, he naturally could sleep in comfort.

However, he and Huo Wujiu shared the same room day after day, and sometimes when Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes, he could see Huo Wujiu in the room.

Recently, when he met eyes with Huo Wujiu, he couldn't help but contemplate. What would General Huo do on the day of the emperor's birthday banquet?

The emperor's birthday was a big day for him, so no blood would be shed at the banquet, and Huo Wujiu was unlikely to be hurt physically.

The emperor was a fool with no brains. Once Huo Wujiu was really in front of him, the emperor would come up with some humiliating slurs, but the harm would only be superficial.

But Jiang Suizhou didn't forget that Pang Shao, who was beside the emperor, was treacherous, and had a belly full of evil tricks.

Needless to say, Jiang Suizhou knew that he would definitely suggest to the emperor a dirty trick or two.

Of course, all these tricks were aimed at Huo Wujiu. Since Jiang Suizhou had already chosen to wash his hands off of it, he didn't have to be afraid. But he was still a little worried. The closer the birthday banquet approached, the more unsettled he was.

Jiang Suizhou could only attribute this mentality to the fact that he and Huo Wujiu were grasshoppers on a rope. They were bound together for good or ill.

What other reason could there be?

Three days passed quickly. When Jiang Suizhou's wind chill had recovered, it was close to the day of the emperor's birthday banquet.

A day prior, Jiang Suizhou once again welcomed the imperial doctor that Pang Shao sent.

When the doctor arrived, Jiang Suizhou was no longer bedridden. He was already dressed properly, draped in a thin cloak and sitting in the main hall reading a book. The doctor stepped forward and diagnosed his pulse, then took two steps back and knelt down.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his hand, picked up the cup of tea on the table and glanced at him lightly.

Then I heard the imperial doctor kneeling on the ground say, "Congratulations, Your Highness. Your health has improved greatly. I can report to His Majesty when I return to the palace that you can attend tomorrow's banquet without any delay…"

Jiang Suizhou raised an eyebrow.

The next moment, the teacup in his hand shattered in front of the imperial doctor with a resounding clang.

The servants in the room were frightened. Even Huo Wujiu, who was by the window, raised his eyes and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

He saw Jiang Suizhou sitting crookedly on a spacious wooden armchair. His arms were resting on the armrest, and his overcoat spread out. He was quite relaxed and indolent.

Jiang Suizhou was born extremely delicate with an ice-cold countenance. When he was looking down at someone, he looked arrogant and aloof, but also exuded an inexplicable poppy-like attraction. Once people laid eyes on him, they would be scared, but at the same time, wouldn't be able to resist the desire to get closer.

In front of him, the teacup shattered into pieces on the ground, and hot tea splashed onto the doctor's robe, making him tremble with fright. Even the words he was about to say got stuck in his throat.

Jiang Suizhou's voice slowly reverberated: "The emperor's birthday banquet…His Majesty's birthday banquet. Why are you reminding me one after another? Do you think I am reluctant to go?"

He knew that this doctor was the dog that Pang Shao kept. While monitoring his health in the name of consultation, Pang Shao instructed him to annoy him even further, one way or another.

The first time, Jiang Suizhou couldn't rebel, but the next time…Pang Shao thought Jiang Suizhou was easy to bully, so he deliberately let others flaunt his power.

Of course he couldn't leave it alone.

T/N: Starting this chapter, the chapters onward will be re-numbered, so it'll be more difficult and less likely for someone to steal it and claim it as their translation. Thank you so much for your understanding! <333

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Chapter 28

The shattering cup of tea caught the imperial doctor off guard. Hearing this, he promptly replied, “Naturally not! His Majesty ordered me…”

“Did Royal Brother tell you that we are at odds, and that I am reluctant to go to his birthday banquet?”

This was naturally the truth. However, having a mutual understanding about this truth was enough, and it must never be laid outright on the table.

Whoever expressed it first would be unfilial and unbrotherly. But if the underlings underneath said it…it would be equivalent to provoking the relationship between their masters.

The doctor did not dare to admit it. He knelt in place and kowtowed, and then hurriedly denied, “His Majesty naturally did not! It’s just that I…”

Jiang Suizhou laughed icily.

“Of course, my royal brother will never say such things. It’s obviously your self-assertion as a servant,” he said, “Since my royal brother has asked you to come treat me, you should perform your duty as a doctor properly. Don’t speak out of turn and tarnish my royal brother’s reputation. I also must punish you on behalf of my royal brother.”

The imperial doctor was flustered and quickly attempted to defend himself.

Inside and outside the palace, was there anyone who thought highly of this unpopular King Jing? Even the powerful man, who sent him to treat his illness, instructed him to beat him.

From the start, King Jing remained silent and submitted meekly to his insults, so he took him as a soft persimmon. It never occurred to him that he was gathering momentum, waiting for the right moment.

Jiang Suizhou did not give him a chance to speak.

“Meng Qianshan.” He opened his mouth and ordered.

Meng Qianshan, who was waiting at the door, hurriedly came forward.

Then the doctor heard Jiang Suizhou say, “Beat him and personally send him back to the palace. Say that this man deliberately provoked the relationship between me and my royal brother. I’ve already punished him, so the rest is up to my royal brother.”

Meng Qianshan had viewed the doctor as an eyesore several times before, so upon hearing Jiang Suizhou’s command, he was so happy that his eyebrows danced with pleasure. He quickly called in the manservants outside the room to drag the doctor out.

Jiang Suizhou gently added, “Drag him far away before beating him. Don’t dirty my ears.”

Meng Qianshan nodded repeatedly and commanded the servants to drag the doctor out.

When the room quieted down, a maid stepped forward, carefully cleaned the floor, and poured a new cup of tea for Jiang Suizhou. Jiang Suizhou picked up the teacup.

He was well aware that Pang Shao sent the doctor. After Jiang Suizhou sent the doctor back, the doctor would not lose his life, though he would certainly be deprived of his official position and expelled from the palace just to spare someone’s feelings.

As a university teacher, he had never even executed corporal punishment to his students, much less let someone take a beating because that person

committed a mistake and provoked him. He would have gotten sacked from his official post without Jiang Suizhou's interference, anyway.

Yet, he must do it.

Those people pressed hard on his heels and picked on him. If he didn't retaliate at all, they would become more aggressive and unscrupulous. He was caught in the dilemmas of the original owner, so if he couldn't bear to hurt his opponents, it would definitely be him who would die.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and looked out the door.

Under the gloomy sky, the exquisite and gorgeous eaves spread out layer upon layer, seemingly trapping him in a chess game.

Jiang Suizhou slowly sighed and once again picked up the book he placed on the table.

He had long been used to Huo Wujiu's living in his room, so he didn't notice that Huo Wujiu had captured all his emotions in his eyes.

Sickly man; it was just giving a man an overdue beating, yet he was the first who couldn't bear it.

Fortunately, he was born in a beautiful and peaceful place. He didn't see blood and didn't go to the battlefield. Otherwise, if he really witnessed a murder, how scared would he be?

Huo Wujiu looked down and collected all these emotions in his eyes.

…*He deserves to be pampered in a lifetime of prosperity.*

——

February 24th was the birthday of the emperor.

Early that morning, it was drizzling outside the window.

Raindrops continuously pattered until dusk, and the rain outside the window didn’t stop even when the time to enter the palace arrived.

The lamps were lit up early in the room. Jiang Suizhou was waited upon as he put on a winding and complicated imperial robe. When he turned around, he saw Meng Qianshan pushing the properly dressed Huo Wujiu out from the back room.

Because of Huo Wujiu’s special status, Jiang Suizhou had instructed Meng Qianshan not to dress him too ostentatiously. However, despite his lavender blue robe and a simple hair crown, the man’s awe-inspiring aura was still outlined. There was no hiding the noble aura that shone from his head to toe.

The candlelights were shining brightly all around, but the man seemed to have a natural glow.

Jiang Suizhou stood riveted for a moment, and it took him a lot of effort to barely withdraw his gaze. He cleared his throat to cover up his gaffe.

“When we enter the palace later, be smart,” he glanced at Meng Qianshan and instructed.

Meng Xiangshan naturally knew what he meant. Jiang Suizhou was asking him to take care of Huo Wujiu.

Meng Qianshan nodded.

The two went all the way out of the royal residence and got into the carriage waiting at the entrance of the residence.

The carriage was not too spacious, and Huo Wujiu’s wheelchair was a bit bulky, so once it was placed on the carriage, the two were extremely close to each other.

As soon as the curtain of the carriage was lowered, silence suddenly settled over the four corners, and only the sound of their breathing remained.

This kind of breathing in a narrow space where one breath fell and another rose gave off the illusion of intertwined breathing. It was particularly audible in the silence when nobody talked.

In such an atmosphere, Jiang Suizhou suddenly and inexplicably felt cornered.

He was sitting beside Huo Wujiu, and with just the two of them so close to each other, he suddenly did not know where to put his hands. He wanted to speak to break the silence, but had nothing to say. He only heard Huo Wujiu’s steady breathing, one after the other, bringing his heartbeat to a slower pace.

Jiang Suizhou urged himself to think of something, such as what the emperor might say once they arrived at the banquet, and how he should respond…

But at that moment, the carriage suddenly lurched forward.

Jiang Suizhou was distracted, and in his inattentiveness, the carriage jostled him askew, and he fell aside.

He happened to pitch headfirst onto Huo Wujiu’s shoulder.

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Chapter 29

The bones and muscles on his shoulder were firm and hard, and with the sudden lurch, they collided with Jiang Suizhou’s eyes.

After a brief period of dizziness, a hand gripped Jiang Suizhou’s arm.

The hand was quite strong, so the moment it gripped Jiang Suizhou, he felt pain in his bones. Immediately after, he was lifted steadily and placed into a stable seat.

“Sit still.” He heard Huo Wujiu’s voice close to him.

Jiang Suizhou rubbed his temples with some embarrassment and cleared his throat.

“Sorry.” He tried to keep his voice as calm and indifferent as possible.

Huo Wujiu answered with a faint muffled grunt.

When the carriage started, the wheels rattled. The sound echoed in the four corners, and the wind gently blew on the curtains, making the atmosphere seem less awkward.

After a moment of silence, Jiang Suizhou secretly glanced at Huo Wujiu.

He was sitting beside him with his head turned slightly sideways, looking calmly out the window. The curtains were slowly lifted, and the rain drizzled in. A few strands of light from outside shone on Huo Wujiu’s face, dropping warm patches of light on his cheeks.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t know if it was his imagination, but he felt that Huo Wujiu’s lips were a little white, which was absolutely abnormal.

But the light in the carriage was too dim, so for a while, Jiang Suizhou couldn’t tell if he had seen it wrong.

He couldn’t help but glance again.

Coincidentally, Huo Wujiu turned his gaze back and looked at him.

Caught in the act, Jiang Suizhou faltered and asked a bit stiffly, “Are you cold?”

He shouldn’t be. It was now past early spring. The rain outside was a bit cool, but it was certainly nothing to Huo Wujiu. After all, not everyone was like him, a paper-mache body.

Huo Wujiu slowly opened his mouth and replied, “No.”

Huo Wujiu’s eyes swept across his legs without a trace.

From this morning when it rained, his legs began to tingle. The pain, which he was accustomed, suddenly became more severe after they had left the house.

Like an iron saw or a blunt axe, the pain cut into his meridians, little by little, tugging at his legs like an endless torture. It was so painful that his scalp was numb. His hand that was resting on his lap clenched tightly into a fist.

Naturally, he would not tell Jiang Suizhou about it, because he neither felt it necessary nor wanted to scare him.

…However, King Jing seems quite bent on chatting with me.

From the time Jiang Suizhou got into the carriage, he was distracted, and was even stealing glances at him just now.

Huo Wujiu casually glanced at Jiang Suizhou.

“Are you cold?” he fired back.

Jiang Suizhou shook his head: “I saw you…you’ve been looking outside, so I thought it was because the wind was too cold.”

Huo Wujiu softly chuckled.

“Why didn’t you suppose I was planning an escape?” he asked. The corners of his mouth were somewhat arched. The curtain stirred slowly, so that the light in his eyes was extinguished. For a moment, they seemed to contain dashes of humor.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned, then inexplicably a little flustered. He hurriedly turned his eyes to the window.

“You can try to run and see if the emperor has sent someone to spy on you in the shadows,” he retorted coldly.

…I just said a few words. Why did you panic?

Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze, and the smile on his lips deepened more.

——

The carriage stopped outside the Kaiyang Gate.

Jiang Suizhou was assisted off the carriage. He found that many carriages had been parked around him, and the officials and female relatives kept shuttling to and fro. It was especially lively.

As soon as he disembarked from the carriage, he felt a lot of eyes falling on him; other people also had their eyes behind him – Jiang Suizhou knew that these people were waiting to see Huo Wujiu.

With an indifferent and arrogant expression, he stood by the carriage while servants hurried forward to move the wheelchair in place for Huo Wujiu.

Seeing the crowd slow down, Jiang Suizhou frowned impatiently.

Want to see the fun, do you? Okay, let me show you.

He swiftly turned around and sternly said to the servants, “Be quicker. How long do you want me to wait?”

The few servants hurriedly bowed to their waists to apologize and hurriedly brought Huo Wujiu out from the carriage.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze, and his piercing eyes scanned the ministers around him.

His exceedingly irritable appearance gave off the impression that innocent bystanders might get caught in the crossfire at any time. Everybody withdrew their eyes in succession. It was as if they saw nothing, and they walked away respectively.

Jiang Suizhou readjusted his gaze with satisfaction, put his hand behind him, and walked directly through Kaiyang Gate.

Meng Qianshan hurriedly pushed Huo Wujiu and quickly followed after Jiang Suizhou.

Because His Highness King Jing was in a foul mood and seemed he would fly into a rage at any moment, the ordinary courtiers dared not strike up a conversation, despite wanting to approach him and exchange pleasantries. Hence, Jiang Suizhou’s trek went a lot smoother.

However, all sorts of scrutiny, explicit or implicit, fell on him and especially on the man behind him.

Huo Wujiu.

In the past, this name was like a fatalistic evil spirit to them.

This was the man who had led the troops all the way from Yangguan to Yecheng, driving them out of their centuries-old ancestral foundation and all the way to the south of the Great River. Late last year, he was the same person who suddenly rose up with tens of thousands of soldiers and horses gathered by the river, looking to cross the river and kill them all.

Fortunately, the Great River was easy to defend and difficult to attack. Also, the advanced troops of the Northern Liang somehow crossed the river, the troops afterwards did not follow. That was how the generals guarding the river picked up the slack and surrounded Huo Wujiu with more than a thousand soldiers and horses.

Even so, that battle lasted for seven to eight days, all the way until their enemies ran out of food and ammunition. Only then was Huo Wujiu barely captured.

What did this mean to the Great Jing?

It was simply like placing one foot into the jaws of death, but was killed by the Impermanence[1] instead.

Now, this Impermanence's legs were crippled, and he was being pushed around, following His Highness King Jing. He came to His Majesty's birthday banquet as a part of His Highness's family.

More or less, the crowd wanted to see what the legendary General Huo looked like, with a green face and jagged teeth like a saw.

However, he didn't resemble the black faced, round eyed, and bearded man they had in their minds.

Footnote:

[1] Impermanence – described as the messenger of the soul in death

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Chapter 30

On the contrary, he was extremely handsome and outstanding.

He sat quietly in a wheelchair with a slender and tall figure that appeared a bit aggrieved no matter which way they looked. However, he sat extremely upright. He was dressed simply. There wasn't much blood in his face, but his facial structures were as sharp as a sheathed blade, and it made people not dare to freely approach.

Just then, the atmosphere around underwent a slight change.

Jiang Suizhou saw a man in his peripheral vision.

He was tall and sturdy. He was obviously wearing a wide-sleeved imperial robe, but appeared instead like a mountain bandit. His grim face was very conspicuous. His copper bell-like large eyes were now filled with grief and anger and were even a little red. He was giving him the evil eye.

…*Oh, Ji Hongcheng.*

Jiang Suizhou secretly took a deep breath.

Ji Hongcheng was a reckless and straightforward man. Seeing Huo Wujiu at this moment, he would probably say or do something.

Jiang Suizhou prepared himself and waited for Ji Hongcheng to launch an attack.

Ji Hongcheng really did stride towards him. His robes fluttered, personifying a black bear that drilled through the cloth store, wrapped in silk and satin, baring its teeth and claws as it pounced to eat people.

However, Ji Hongcheng abruptly stopped three steps away from him.

Jiang Suizhou halted and frowned at him. He saw Ji Hongcheng standing there motionless.

…*What is he doing?*

Jiang Suizhou was somewhat confused. Then, Ji Hongcheng fiercely glared at him with his large bell-like eyes, turned around and left. The delicate and pretty lady beside him turned around rather apologetically and saluted Jiang Suizhou.

…*He just left?*

Jiang Suizhou gave him a puzzled look and just assumed that the guy didn’t dare to go crazy at the birthday feast of the emperor.

Little did he know that when Ji Hongcheng was about to charge towards him, a tiny paper-wrapped ball flew out of the air as sharp as an arrow and steadily hit Ji Hongcheng’s chest, then fell into his arms.

No one saw this small fly-sized object, and no one saw who did it.

Only Ji Hongcheng, who hastily hid in the latrine and carefully unfolded the paper ball to look at it, knew.

Strong and soft calligraphy graced the paper. At first glance, it was General Huo’s handwriting.

[Don’t send letters again. Bide your time for a better chance.

When Lou Yue returns to the capital, send Zhi Liu to me.]

Ji Hongcheng immediately understood what he meant.

It turned out that, without him having to say it, General Huo had already planned ahead. He had not done anything, but was just waiting for the right time.

The timing… depended on General Lou.

But General Lou was bent on loyalty and service to the kingdom while General Hou was a rebel…Would General Lou really help him?

Ji Hongcheng's heart was beating drums. He stuffed the note into his mouth and swallowed it.

——

Huo Wujiu had figured that he would meet Ji Hongcheng at the banquet today.

Although this person said he wanted to help him, he didn't help much. On the contrary, the frequent letters he sent were all useless news which would more likely attract attention and cause trouble for King Jing's mansion.

To Huo Wujiu, Ji Hongcheng's only role was to contact Lou Yue for him.

Huo Wujiu sat quietly in his wheelchair, his gaze extremely profound.

He persisted on staying alive, not to let the emperor humiliate him for a few more years, but to wait for the right opportunity to leave here. In the whole of Southern Jing, he couldn't find someone he knew, and the only person he could use was Lou Yue.

Although Lou Yue stood opposite his father's camp and was now hostile to him, he owed Huo Wujiu a life in his early years, which could be considered a personal favor.

He didn't want to coerce grace for reward, and he would never let Lou Yue do anything against his principles. But now that he was trapped in the enemy camp, he could only use this favor to find a way out.

With this in mind, he raised his eyes and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou was walking one step in front of him, with a tall and slender posture and fluttering robes. He must have been sporting a fiendish look at

the moment, which made those around him cautiously look in their direction, but not dare to step forward.

If there really was such a day…Jiang Suizhou most probably wouldn't sit idle.

Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze.

If the heavens really spared him; if he still would have a semblance of power lef, he'd see if he could save this rabbit. King Jing was still good-hearted and harbored some inexplicable infatuation for him.

Jiang Suizhou, the man in front of him, did not know what Huo Wujiu who was behind him was thinking.

He was led by the palace staff all the way to Qiuwu Palace Hall, where he saw a eunuch waiting for him. When the eunuch saw him, he immediately welcomed him with a smile and gave him a big salute.

"Greetings, Your Highness. I will show you to your seat."

After speaking, he turned sideways and moved to invite Jiang Suizhou inside.

Just then, his gaze fell behind Jiang Suizhou.

At once, the flattering smile on the eunuch's face flickered for several seconds before he stepped forward and said, "Please, Your Highness. There are rules in our palace – family members need to sit separately in the women's seats."

With that, he raised his voice and said behind him, "Someone, come here quickly. Lead His Highness's wife to the west banquet hall…"

However, Jiang Suizhou coldy raised his hand, interrupting his order.

Send Huo Wujiu to sit there with female relatives? Seriously?

Needless to say, Jiang Suizhou knew that this was the method the emperor thought of to humiliate Huo Wujiu. Moreover, this would also leave Huo Wujiu alone. By then, any dirty trick played would be like shooting fish in a barrel.

Therefore, he definitely could not agree.

As for how he could argue…

Jiang Suizhou paused and gave Huo Wujiu a gloomy glance, then his gaze returned to the eunuch.

His eyes were as cold as a viper. With a shadow of a smile, he suddenly displayed a somewhat unspeakable, eerie, perversion.

He spoke unhurriedly.

“I need to personally keep an eye on my wife. He is very wild, and only I can control him…Please make an exception for me, eunuch.”

He spoke softly, but inexplicably made the eunuch’s back shudder. The eunuch cautiously scrutinized King Jing and saw him standing backlit, with a cool smirk at the corners of his mouth.

His bearing and delivery clearly wasn’t asking him to bend the rules, but was more like telling him that he had to bring his extra portable plaything to fiddle with.

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Chapter 31

Who in the palace didn’t know that King Jing was perverse?

He not only played with men, but also toyed them to death. Everyone said that he took after his enchanting concubine mother, born to suck the Yang energy of men.

The eunuch was shocked, and his eyes involuntarily drifted toward Huo Wujiu.

Although the man in the wheelchair looked tall, his lips were quite pale.

He was looking down without any expression on his face. He was evidently bold and sharp in appearance, but under Jiang Suizhou’s shadow, he appeared somewhat pitiful.

Look, there was even a wound on his eyebrow. Was it inflicted by King Jing himself?

After a quick glance, the eunuch immediately averted his eyes, and failed to notice what kind of mood the poor man sitting behind King Jing was hiding under his drooping eyelashes.

The eunuch bowed and was caught in a dilemma: “Uhm…”

He hesitated for a moment and said with a forced smile, “Your Highness, this is truly against the rules.”

Jiang Suizhou turned cold and was about to speak…

Just then, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of a crowd of people climbing up the steps, drawing nearer.

Many officials clustered around and were lively. They followed a courtier in a vermilion court dress all the way up the stairs as if he was the sun.

A red court dress, the highest rank.

There was no other person who could have worn this robe except Pang Shao.

Jiang Suizhou's heart tightened.

He knew that the little eunuch in front of him was easy to fool, but Pang Shao was a thousand-year-old fox. Jiang Suizhou was fighting for Huo Wujiu to stay by his side, but one careless move would let Pang Shao see the clues.

He went rigid, his heart hammering.

The next moment, amidst the noise of approaching people, he turned sideways and grabbed Huo Wujiu's chin, roughly lifting his face up like an object on display.

With cold eyebrows and a shadow of a meaningful smile on his lips, he looked at the eunuch and said, "Against the rules? Then let me see whether he is male or female."

Jiang Suizhou heard the weakening of the approaching voices behind him. That group of people must have noticed the dispute on their side.

Jiang Suizhou was so nervous that his hands trembled a little.

However, he hoped that nothing was revealed and also hoped that Huo Wujiu knew this was only a desperate measure…

The eunuch froze.

He stared at Jiang Suizhou's movements in a daze, and then found that His Highness King Jing, whose lush feminine beauty carried an evil air, tightly pinched General Huo's chin and forced him to raise his face to directly face him.

The man’s eyes were still downcast, and as he raised his head, a hideous scar was revealed at his collar.

It lay across his clavicle, and although it had scabbed, the edges were still red. It looked a bit appalling in the vibrant light.

The eunuch’s legs went limp in fright.

“H-He’s a man of course…” he stammered.

His Highness King Jing gave a cold laugh and flung Huo Wujiu’s face away.

“Isn’t that right?”

He slowly and methodically took a handkerchief out of his bosom and slowly wiped up the hand that had touched Huo Wujiu.

“You’re sending him off with a bunch of women; are you not afraid of accidents? I’m even more uneasy.”

He slowly wiped his already clean fingers one by one, and the moment his hand loosened, his handkerchief fluttered to the ground.

“I’m afraid of getting dirty, you should know that,” he looked up and said.

“This…This…” the eunuch clammed up for a while.

Just then, Jiang Suizhou heard a burst of laughter behind him.

“I was wondering who the official here was. It turned out to be Your Highness King Jing!” The man laughed aloud.

Jiang Suizhou turned around.

Pang Shao was standing there, just a few steps behind him.

Although this old bastard frequently persecuted him recently, it wasn’t until today that he came face to face with Pang Shao for the first time.

Unlike his repulsive appearance in portraits, this old bastard was born with an upright appearance. When dressed in a court robe, he exuded quite a majesty that reached the high heavens.

Only his eyes were exceedingly deep with a touch of an elusive gleam.

Jiang Suizhou tensed up.

He coldly swept Pang Shao a glance, put on a look of disinterest, and faintly said, “Pang-daren[1].”

His gesture could be regarded as very rude. Although Jiang Suizhou was a prince, Pang Shao was also his biological granduncle with the highest official rank as the Grand Minister over the Masses. In terms of status, the two of them were not much different, not to mention Pang Shao’s power.

But Jiang Suizhou knew that this attitude was what the original owner should have had.

As expected, Pang Shao remained amiable and wasn’t the least bit indignant. Instead, he bowed, leading the courtiers around him to salute Jiang Suizhou. Then he smiled and asked, “Your Highness, why are you standing here?”

Jiang Suizhou’s expression cooled further, and after a faint glance at Huo Wujiu, he quickly averted his gaze in disgust and no longer looked at him again.

“It’s nothing.” He turned sideways, seemingly unwilling to talk more. “Pang-daren, you first, please.”

Pang Shao, however, did not move, but instead addressed the eunuch, “On His Majesty’s joyous day, how did you displease His Highness King Jing?”

The eunuch hurriedly stepped forward, knelt down and said, “Pang-daren, the King…the King wants to bring his wife to the table.”

There naturally was no need for him to explain because Pang Shao had noted Jiang Suizhou's every word and action just now.

Pang Shao looked at Jiang Suizhou with a smile.

"Let His Highness take him with him. The king and his wife are very much in love. Do you want to separate the lovebirds?"

He spoke slowly.

Jiang Suizhou's face immediately turned ugly, as if he had swallowed something dirty. He could barely hide his disgust.

Still, his face wasn't stretched taut and he only softly scoffed.

The eunuch repeatedly said yes and bowed to invite Jiang Suizhou to his seat.

Pang Shao's words seemed to have disgusted Jiang Suizhou. He no longer spared him a glance again, turned around as if no one was in his sight and left.

Pang Shao stood in place and watched him leave.

Seeing Jiang Suizhou drifting away, an official nearby said discontentedly, "His Highness is really rude."

Pang Shao smiled and shook his head. He didn't think much of it, and his eyes even flashed with a gratified smile.

"Your Highness is just young," he replied nonchalantly.

——

1 Daren – honorific for high-ranking officials or nobilities

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Chapter 32

The banquet hall was very spacious, as the banquet rule stipulated one person per table. Huo Wujiu was also in a wheelchair, so there was no need to add a chair, just bowls and chopsticks.

Jiang Suizhou sat abandonedly before his table. The eunuch saw that when His Highness King Jing took his seat, he turned his head and gave the general a cold and disgusted glare.

The eunuch hastily retreated.

He didn’t see that when His Highness King Jing looked at Madam Huo, he quickly apologized. “Forgive me.”

Jiang Suizhou was in a cold sweat just now, not only because of his fear that something would go wrong during his first contact with Pang Shao, but more importantly, the series of actions he subjected Huo Wujiu to.

It was like pulling the tiger’s whiskers!

Jiang Suizhou was petrified, so as soon as he found an opportunity, he immediately apologized to Huo Wujiu.

He didn’t expect Huo Wujiu to respond to him at all. He also thought about how to logically explain it to him again later on their way back.

But Huo Wujiu looked at him and winked slowly.

He seemed to be conveying: I know.

Jiang Suizhou was startled, and he could hardly retain his ice-cold visage.

He quickly averted his eyes, picked up the teacup on the table and took a sip to calm his nerves.

His wink just now…Was it a response to him? It shouldn't mean, "You're dead tonight," right?

Jiang Suizhou's fingers trembled a little.

Behind him, Huo Wujiu shot him a pensive glance, concealing a bit of deep meaning that was extremely difficult to detect in the depths of his eyes.

Jiang Suizhou was so calm and composed in front of so many people just now, so why did he look at him and start acting scared again?

Nonetheless, this was the first time he saw Jiang Suizhou in front of people.

He was a superb actor, seeing how he even fooled Pang Shao. Jiang Suizhou's performance indeed incited hatred. No wonder Ji Hongcheng flew into a rage because of him and wrote obscenities in his letter.

But…

Huo Wujiu surprisingly found it a bit cute.

When Jiang Suizhou looked at him with that seemingly hostile stance that actually hid pinches of nervousness, he felt like a paw was scratching his heart somewhere, causing a tickling itch.

Huo Wujiao involuntarily raised his hand and gently stroked his chin with his knuckles.

Jiang Suizhou's cold and soft touch seemed to linger there.

His hands had trembled gently, as if he tried his utmost best to control it, but all to no avail.

Consequently, Jiang Suizhou's supposed insulting ferocity unexpectedly acquired a piteous touch, making his viciousness like a paper tiger that

would break with a poke. On the surface, he railed candidly, but in fact, he swayed tremblingly, as if looking for support.

Restraining himself from grabbing Jiang Suizhou’s hand into his own demanded more determination than enduring the pain of cruel torture.

——

Outside the door, the rain pattered incessantly, but brilliant lights filled the inside of the hall.

Amidst the gold and jade splendor, all high-ranking officials and lords were celebrating with songs and dance. If Jiang Suizhou were someone else, he really would have been dazzled and thought that the imperial court was at the peak of its power and had centuries left to live.

But Jiang Suizhou knew that this prosperous gaiety in front of him was the result of emptying the national treasury and also plundering countless surrounding states and counties. It was barely scraped together.

Beneath the glitz was a rickety, empty frame.

It was getting late. The court eunuchs sang and drank, then silence suddenly settled down everywhere.

His Majesty had arrived.

Jiang Suizhou rose to his feet with the courtiers and quietly waited for the emperor to sit down on the throne. Afterward, with the eunuch’s cry, he, along with the ministers, knelt thrice and kowtowed nine times towards the emperor, performing the most solemn of salutes.

When the last salute was over, the ministers kneeled in place, waiting for the emperor to let them rise.

The grand eunuch inclined towards the emperor nearby with a horsetail whisk in his hand waited for a moment, but he didn’t hear a sound from the man on the throne.

…What was he up to now?

The grand eunuch felt a bit apprehensive, so he cautiously looked up. On the magnificent throne, the resplendently-dressed emperor sat askew, touching his chin with one hand and looking thoughtfully at the bottom of the step.

What is…?

The grand eunuch followed his gaze and saw that among the kneeling courtiers, there was only one person who stood out from the crowd, sitting there quietly and silently opposite the emperor.

His gaze was calm and indifferent, and he stared directly at His Majesty without any fear.

Huo Wujiu.

The grand eunuch knew this man. When Huo Wujiu was escorted back to Lin'an, he went to the dungeon with His Majesty once. That was the first time that man met His Majesty. Several officers and soldiers tried to force Huo Wujiu down on his knees, but were unsuccessful.

It was also on that occasion that His Majesty ordered his hamstrings to be picked off.

T-This man indeed can't kneel now…but the look on His Majesty seems like he still wants to launch an attack, doesn't it?

The grand eunuch's heart throbbed uneasily.

Just then, he heard His Majesty speak lazily.

"My dear subjects, you may rise," he said.

Having received his decree, the ministers at the bottom of the stairs stood up and returned to their seats.

The grand eunuch sighed with relief.

His Majesty was truly foolish. In the past, the previous emperor suppressed him, so he was still restrained. However, now that he was the emperor, the Grand Minister over the Masses blindly obeyed him, making him sometimes ridiculous regardless of the occasion. Hence, servants like them were also in constant fear.

It would be best if His Majesty didn't fly into a rage and instead, spent his birthday smoothly…

However, he was just halfway relieved when he heard His Majesty speak again.

"Hiss…Fifth Brother." The emperor rested his cheek on one hand. Without announcing the start of the feast, he picked up a shrimp ball from the table in front of him and stuffed it into his mouth.

"All the ministers have kneeled just now…except your wife. Why didn't he kneel before me?"

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Chapter 33

Jiang Suizhou gave him a good dressing-down inwardly.

Kneel to you? Let me break your legs, and you try kneeling.

He raised his head to look at the emperor. Then his eyes swept through the room. He saw that most of the courtiers around him were looking at him with a touch of schadenfreude, looking calm and composed amid the mess.

Watching the emperor persecute him and Huo Wujiu must have been a long-awaited show for them.

Jiang Suizhou paused and stood up. He turned around with grace and bowed toward the emperor.

“My wife has been rude. Please forgive me, Royal Brother,” he said.

Hearing his apology, the emperor slowly chewed the shrimp ball in his mouth and languidly smiled. “All right, I’ll forgive you. But how do you intend to make me forgive you?”

Jiang Suizhou glanced at Huo Wujiu who was beside him.

“Although this thing is crippled, our intentions must be given priority and can’t be lacking.” Jiang Suizhou’s gaze was cold and contemptuous, as if he had been tainted by a turbid object. A sprinkle of impatience and abhorrence even tinged his tone.

After speaking, he raised his eyes to look at Meng Qianshan at the back, and said, “Why aren’t you bringing him over? Today, even if we drag him, we must let him kowtow to my royal brother.” The last few words were almost squeezed out from between his teeth.

It was evident that His Highness, King Jing, indeed harbored an undying hatred and disgust for Huo Wujiu, who had been stuffed into his mansion.

If that was so, did he still lock him up in the room for torture?

The emperor became more and more excited, while Meng Qianshan, who was standing behind the seat, was stunned.

He knew that His Highness wanted to pretend to hate Madam Huo…but was he going to do it for real?

H-How could he do this!

Just then, Meng Qianshan saw Jiang Suizhou frowning gently and looking at him with an icy gaze.

“Be careful when you move,” he said. “Don’t let the dirty blood on his legs get on the carpet and bring bad luck to the emperor.”

During palace banquets, especially one for the emperor’s birthday, one should never shed blood. This had always been the precept of the Jing Dynasty.

Sure enough, the emperor opened his mouth to ask when he heard these words, “What dirty blood?”

Jiang Suizhou glanced at Meng Qianshan, slowly blinked, and then spoke nonchalantly, “It’s nothing, just be careful.”

After saying that, Jiang Suizhou addressed Meng Qianshan again.

“If you dare stain the ground, even just a spot, I’ll ask for your head.”

Meng Qianshan shuddered in fright, and in the next moment, he met Jiang Suizhou’s eyes.

He was immediately enlightened.

That’s right…Before leaving the residence today, His Highness had cautioned him!

Meng Qianshan promptly turned around and kneeled down with a poof toward the emperor.

“Your Majesty, please help! Madam’s leg…Yesterday, His Highness was… His Highness was just careless! The wound on Madam’s leg now bleeds when touched, and it has not yet scabbed to this day…This servant does not dare to cause bad luck for Your Majesty!”

Meng Qianshan finished stammering while trembling. When everyone heard this, they immediately thought that Jiang Suizho must have tortured Huo Wujiu yesterday. He took him out for fun, to let other people toy with the cripple some more.

The emperor felt somewhat chilled deep inside.

Sure enough, his uncle was right. The most interesting thing was not to beat the dog, but to put two dogs into a kennel and watch them tear at each other.

But…

It was pleasurable, but really forcing Huo Wujiu to kowtow in blood at his banquet was also something he couldn’t do —— He wasn’t afraid of his ancestors’ decrees, but of bad luck. He feared that the Heavens would see it and jeopardize his predestined lifespan.

However, he must regain his dignity and not lose it.

In the next moment, the smile on the emperor’s face deepened, and his gaze flickered between Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu.

Finally, he looked at Jiang Suizhou and said, “Then forget it. He’s bloody, and I’m not such an unreasonable person either,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou breathed a sigh of relief, but he still didn’t forget to display a look of reluctance on his face. He even coldly glared at Huo Wujiu.

However, before he could be completely relieved, the emperor spoke again.

“However, since he is your concubine, you two, more or less, are one and the same, right?” The emperor said with a smile.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes to look at him.

The emperor smiled smugly and said, “You kneel for him.”

All the courtiers sat at the edge of their seats, all eyes centered on him.

…There was no doubt that the emperor was taking the opportunity to trample on Jiang Suizhou’s dignity again.

Jiang Suizhou took a deep breath and grit his teeth.

He knew that this accursed fatuous ruler would never give up after receiving Pang Shao’s guidance.

Forget it. Had he suffered any less from the emperor for Huo Wujiu’s sake? It was now just one more kowtow. It was just a disgrace and was no big deal.

Jiang Suizhou quickly completed a good psychological construction, not forgetting to show humiliation on his face. He looked at the emperor, waiting for him to force him again. He would then kowtow like a duck driven to a perch and end the matter.

But at that juncture, a low voice reverberated in the silent hall.

“Who is he to take my place?” This was said with a pinch of contempt.

Jiang Suizhou froze.

What was Huo Wujiu doing!

He looked behind him in surprise, and the ministers in the hall also looked at Huo Wujiu, one after the other.

Jiang Suizhou saw Huo Wujiu on his wheelchair with his head raised, looking at the emperor in the distance.

Just then, Huo Wujiu curled one corner of his lips and lazily showed a provocative smile to the emperor.

For a moment, he was like the sun shining into the deep valley. His flamboyant and sharp appearance suddenly glittered, and it called to mind a war flag raised again by the wind, akin to the beacon fire roaring up in the city.

This seemed to be his original appearance, dressed in fine clothes and leading a luxurious life, arrogant and failing to show restraint.

Jiang Suizhou listened to Huo Wujiu, who continued, “I, Huo Wujiu, as a minister, only kneel for my own monarch,” he questioned slowly. “What qualifications does he have to replace me?”

The raised end note of his voice sounded smooth and condescending.

The emperor was so livid that his eyes were almost popping out.

“Your monarch?” He gritted his teeth. “You, Huo, are originally the vassals of my Great Jing, the watch dogs I raised. What kind of monarch do you have?”

Jiang Suizhou saw Huo Wujiu laugh and shake his head, as if he had heard some kind of joke.

It was the first time Jiang Suizhou saw Huo Wujiu laugh.

He was a bit wild, but extremely dazzling, like a blade buried in the mud and sand, reflecting the brilliance of the blazing sun.

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Chapter 34

“Even if the Huos are watch dogs, you don’t order us about, either,” he said, “Ancient precepts state that the North should expel foreign enemies to guard Yecheng —— Your Majesty, your father already lost Yecheng three years ago.”

The emperor shook with rage.

How dare he say that? Yecheng was defeated by his self-proclaimed loyal Huo family!

This was clearly a grandiose slap on his face! He wished he could have someone tie Huo Wujiu down immediately, tear him to pieces, and feed the chunks of him to dogs.

But he couldn’t. His uncle had said that keeping this man would still be of great use. Besides, only by keeping him alive could he have him tortured and make his life worse than death…

The emperor’s eyes were on the verge of splitting. He took a few deep breaths and looked at Pang Shao like a plea for help.

Meanwhile, Jiang Suizhou, who was standing at the bottom of the steps, was already so ecstatic that he could barely hide the smile at the corners of his mouth.

Although he knew that the emperor had left Huo Wujiu alive and wouldn’t let him die so easily, he did not expect that Huo Wujiu would actually rely on this fact to openly challenge the emperor at the banquet.

Was he inherently good at angering people? No wonder he was usually reticent. It turned out that he was keeping his weakness unexposed!

Jiang Suizhou felt nothing but utter gratification. However, he was distinctly aware that he must say something at this time. Otherwise, if he remained silent, the emperor would take action.

Even if the emperor didn't kill Huo Wujiu, it wouldn't end well for him today, either. Jiang Suizhou grabbed a jade cup on the table and smashed it straight onto the table in front of Huo Wujiu.

A small jade cup didn't have much killing power, but when it suddenly hit the corner of the table, the resounding clang was enough to jolt everyone around them.

Jiang Suizhou turned to Huo Wujiu, gnashing his teeth. He looked gloomy, like he was concealing his fury.

"Very good." He snarled one word at a time, and because of his extremely frail physique, even his breath began to quiver from restraining his anger. "It seems that I haven't taught you how to shut up."

The last few words, uttered between clenched teeth, were so gloomy that it made people's blood run cold.

All the ministers felt that if it hadn't been for the emperor's birthday banquet, the furious King Jing would have rushed forward and strangled Huo Wujiu.

Upon seeing this, the emperor's rage finally dropped a couple of notches.

Right, there was still King Jing. There was no need for the emperor to take action himself and spoil the joy of his birthday.

Huo Wujiu dared to spout a stream of empty rhetoric, but once they returned to King Jing's mansion, he was sure to beg for life and then death.

Under the high platform, his uncle also shook his head at him, signaling for the emperor to suppress his anger and not to get angry.

He grit his teeth and squeezed a few words out in between them.

“Spoilsport,” he said. “All right, I’m hungry. Let’s start the feast.”

At once, the courtiers all around hastened to raise their cups as if nothing had happened. An orchestra of traditional Chinese stringed and woodwind instruments sounded, and grandsounding, peaceful music immediately echoed, like a desperate attempt to chase away the thick tension in the hall just now.

The emperor took a sip of wine.

Strange.

Although it was a dog-eat-dog situation, and dripping fresh blood was very nice, why did he have this feeling that…although they bit each other, he couldn’t take advantage of them at all?

——

Jiang Suizhou vaguely figured out why Huo Wujiu did this.

He didn’t quite dare to believe it.

Could it be that Huo Wujiu really took such a big risk just to keep him from kowtowing to the emperor alone?

Huo Wujiu must know better than he did that the emperor was a wretch. Regardless of the occasion, he would most likely, in a fit of anger, drag him back to the Imperial Prison in front of all the civil and military officials to be drawn and quartered.

Jiang Suizhou’s heart was quite shaken.

But he did not dare to look at Huo Wujiu more than once.

He still needed to put on a cold look at this time, treating Huo Wujiu who was next to him as if he was air. He barely took a few bites of the food on the table and only occasionally drank a glass of wine.

Moreover, none of the officials in the hall dared to offend him. When they walked to and fro to toast, they tacitly bypassed Jiang Suizhou's table.

On the contrary, this saved Jiang Suizhou from a lot of trouble.

Outside the door, the pattering rain didn't lessen at all. Amidst the glittering lights, toasts went gaily around, and the faces of the people were gradually dyed the drunken color of pinkish red.

Some ministers began to go forward to give the emperor a toast.

Jiang Suizhou was bored silly, sitting at the table listening to their exaggerated birthday toasts. He occasionally stole glances at Huo Wujiu out of the corner of his eye, involuntarily replaying what had just happened in his mind.

Just then, he heard a voice from the front of the steps.

That person's eloquence was quite remarkable. He jabbered on and on, without finishing his benediction. Jiang Suizhou was quite amazed when he heard him, and glanced at him.

…*Chen Ti?*

The man who had his wife hand Huo Wujiu an invitation to enjoy the flowers.

Jiang Suizhou picked up his cup of tea and took a sip.

In terms of ass-kissing, this man was indeed an expert at everything. It was no wonder he was making a living under Pang Shao.

Just then, Jiang Suizhou heard Chen Ti, who had drained his cup of wine, speak. "Your Majesty, today is a day of rejoicing, so I'd like to brazenly ask for a grace from Your Majesty," he said with a grin.

Then Jiang Suizhou heard the emperor ask, "What is it? Tell me."

Then he saw Chen Ti holding his cup and saying with a smile, “A few days ago, my humble wife handed a written invitation to King Jing’s residence, wanting to invite Madam Huo to enjoy the flowers. But Madam Huo is a newcomer and was a bit reserved, so he rejected the invitation.”

After he said this, Chen Ti turned his head and looked at Jiang Suizhou’s table with a smile.

“For fear of slighting His highness King Jing, my humble wife specifically asked me to beg Your Majesty to allow Madam Huo to come to my humble abode in half a month’s time for a flower viewing banquet.”

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Chapter 35

On the carriage returning home, Jiang Suizhou's face was frosty.

He didn't expect that Chen Ti would be so eager for quick success and instant profits to the point that he even abandoned his dignity.

Of course he knew what Chen Ti wanted to do. Inviting Huo Wujiu to his courtyard to appreciate some rotten flowers was a pretense. Seeing that the emperor suffered a defeat, Chen Ti purposely provided the emperor a comeback at his own banquet. What he was really doing was sucking up to the emperor's ass.

After all, Chen Ti had been under Pang Shao's command. His official position was not high, so there were few opportunities for him to really show his face in front of the emperor. Last time, Jiang Suizhou turned down his invitation, but in turn gave him a raft, giving him a chance to win a laugh from the emperor.

As expected, the emperor responded readily, and gave Jiang Suizhou no chance to refute. He even promoted Chen Ti half a rank higher on the spot, rewarding him with a cushy job.

The banquet was, of course, to everyone's delight and satisfaction, except that Jiang Suizhou's pretend coldness had turned real cold.

At the end of the palace banquet, the rain fell even harder outside.

And with the sudden downpour, a gust of wind blew, whistling and stirring the brocade curtains on the carriage. Droplets of rain also blew into the carriage.

Shortly after, half of Jiang Suizhou's shoulders were wet, but he did not feel anything. He only stared frostily out the window.

Jiang Suizhou knew that although the palace banquet was not a Hongmen Banquet[1], those people had long been fully motivated to take them for the sheer pleasure of the emperor.

He definitely couldn't counterattack all overt attacks and covert means. However, when such a bootlicker suddenly took advantage of him, he was still upset.

Especially…What about Huo Wujiu?

Jiang Suizhou had always been afraid that Huo Wujiu would hate him, and planning for him had become a habit. Although the matter today had nothing to do with him, Jiang Suizhou was still irritated by it.

Just then, a cold wind whistled in, making Jiang Suizhou shiver from the cold.

His throat itched, and he coughed.

But before he could cough, a soft and heavy cloak fell on him without warning. The cloak carried a nice and warm body heat that bundled him up in a split second.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned. He raised his head and saw Huo Wujiu sitting next to him, as silent as a post.

It was he who took off his cloak and draped it onto Jiang Suizhou.

"You…" Now that he took off his cloak, Jiang Suizhou found that Huo Wujiu was already thinly dressed, so Jiang Suizhou moved to take off the cloak and give it back to him.

It was just then that he heard Huo Wujiu speak: "You've just recovered."

Jiang Suizhou clutched Huo Wujiu's cloak in his hand: "Hmm?"

Huo Wujiu turned his head sideways and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

“Drape it properly over your shoulders,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou awkwardly draped the huge cloak over himself.

Although he was not in good health now, he had at least been a healthy person for more than twenty years, so he often forgot that he was a sick man. He never expected that Huo Wujiu was more mindful of it than he was.

Seeing that Jiang Suizhou obediently retracted into his cloak, Huo Wujiu tucked in the corners for him, and then turned around with satisfaction.

Jiang Suizhou glanced at him.

He somehow felt that Huo Wujiu’s lip color was not right. When they had arrived, his lips were a bit pale, but they seemed a bit whiter now.

“…Are you not cold?” He asked.

He heard Huo Wujiu snort and glanced at him: “What kind of cold is this?”

When it came to coldness, Yangguan was called cold. The snow in winter could bury tent doors overnight, and they had to dig and kick to open the doors.

In the dimly lit carriage, Huo Wujiu raised his eyebrow slightly as he looked sideways, revealing a touch of rare juvenile spirit.

His appearance was a bit similar to how he looked in the palace hall earlier. However, it was less aggressive, and even somewhat showing off.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but follow him with a chuckle, wrapped in the big cloak.

“Forget it if you’re not cold,” he said.

Seeing him smile, Huo Wujiu’s gaze couldn’t help but stay on him. He stared at Jiang Suizhou a couple more times.

In a dim corner of the carriage, the robe on his leg had long been drenched. The dampness seeped into his injured leg, and it felt like a blade was digging into his bones. It hurt so much that he started to shiver uncontrollably.

It was because of the bumpy ride that Jiang Suizhou was unaware that something was astir.

However, it was just right that he took no notice.

Although taking off his cloak and wrapping it around his legs might alleviate the pain to a certain degree, Huo Wujiu could not bear to see the sick rabbit shivering. For him, he just had to endure the pain, and it would soon pass. But if King Jing were to freeze and fall ill again due to the wind and rain, he’d have to take fever medicine when they returned. He was afraid he would cry again because of the bitter decoction.

Now, it was really not a loss in exchange for his not half bad smile.

——

Jiang Suizhou slept lightly at night.

He went back to his room, changed his robes and laid down, still thinking about what happened today. He mulled over everything as the rain outside the window was pouring, and he fell asleep in a daze.

He was awakened by the sound of a small, crisp object falling to the ground.

He opened his eyes, and found that only a night lamp was lit outside the canopy. What was brighter was the lightning flashes outside the window. He looked sideways at the window and saw a tall silhouette amidst the lightning flashes and rumbling thunder. He sat up from the bed with some effort, seemingly to pick up something.

Jiang Suizhou quickly got up.

“What’s wrong?” His voice sounded hoarse from having just woken up.

Huo Wujiu didn’t respond to him for a moment, and only with great effort did he manage to sit up straight.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly got out of bed, put on his shoes and walked to the couch.

It wasn’t until Jiang Suizhou was in front of him that Huo Wujiu seemed to notice that he was awake. Huo Wujiu’s eyebrows were tightly furrowed as he raised his head to look at him. He asked in a dumb voice, “Did I wake you up?”

In the dim light of the night, his face was exceptionally white, and his forehead was covered with a layer of fine sweat, which soaked the strands of hair on his forehead.

Footnote:

1 Hongmen banquet – a metaphor for a banquet that hides murderous intent and attempts to harm guests.

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Chapter 36

Jiang Suizhou was alarmed and immediately asked, “What’s wrong with you?”

Jiang Suizhou saw Huo Wujiu raising his hand and rubbing his forehead. He seemed a little disoriented by the pain.

His hand was also shaking.

Jiang Suizhou had never seen Huo Wujiu like this before, not even when he came out of the prison, feverish and with his wounds still inflamed.

“Where are you hurting? I’ll ask Meng Qianshan to fetch the doctor!”

Huo Wujiu just shook his head.

“I’m fine. It’s raining, which makes my legs uncomfortable.”

He didn’t seem to know how wretched he looked at this point, and still stubbornly strained to speak.

“My medicine fell on the floor; just help me pick it up,” he said.

When Jiang Suizhou heard him say medicine, he hurriedly bent down to pick it up for him. A small medicine bottle fell to the ground two steps away. The material was plain but especially sturdy, so it did not break.

Jiang Suizhou handed the medicine to him.

He watched as Huo Wujiu tremblingly and slowly poured one out, put it in his mouth and swallowed it. Then, he stuffed the medicine bottle into his arms and laid down with his eyes closed.

It looked like he was going to go back to sleep.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned and asked, “What is this medicine for?”

According to the normal course of events before Huo Wujiu’s capture, he couldn’t have possibly known that his legs would be crippled. How could he have brought leg curing medicine with him?

Huo Wujiu frowned and opened his eyes again.

Although he was dizzy with pain this time, and his eyes were blurry to the point where he could not even feel his body shaking, he knew the cause of his leg pain.

His meridians were damaged, so when it rained on a cloudy day, this kind of pain was naturally indispensable, not to mention the humid and rainy Southern Jing. This pain was not life-threatening, just a little trying to endure. There was no doubt that when the rain stopped, he would naturally feel better.

“A kind of medicine that keeps people from dying.” Hearing Jiang Suizhou ask him anxiously at the side, as if he had encountered something serious, the corners of Huo Wujiu’s lips curled up. Huo Wujiu’s voice was hoarse, mixed with a touch of nonchalance.

Huo Wujiu hadn’t felt anything yet, but why did King Jing get so scared that his hair stood on ends?

Hearing his reply, Jiang Suizhou’s eyes widened.

You’re in such pain, yet you’re still taking medication indiscriminately?

It’s obvious that you think you’ve lived long enough!

“Nonsense!” Jiang Suizhou blurted out, turned around and hurriedly went outside.

“Meng Qianshan!”

Huo Wujiu sat crookedly on the couch. His ears were buzzing, and he vaguely heard Jiang Suizhou's anxious voice. Tch, this was a trivial matter for him to be causing such a fuss about.

"You're making a fuss over nothing."

Huo Wujiu grunted impatiently. However, he could not control the corners of his lips, which wanted to curl upwards.

——

Lights were lit up all over Anyin Hall, bringing a melting warmth in the midst of the cold rain.

The mansion doctor, Zhou, listened to Huo Wujiu's pulse and examined his injury carefully. After a long time, he stood up.

"How is he?" Jiang Suizhou asked beside him.

Doctor Zhou bowed to him and answered, "Your Highness, Madam's symptoms are what were left behind by his damaged meridians. Whenever it is cold and rainy or snowy, the pain will be excruciating."

Jiang Suizhou frowned: "Is there any cure?"

Doctor Zhou shook his head.

"There is no other way, unless Madam's meridians are restored to their previous state…But, the meridians on Madam's legs are completely damaged. It is truly incurable."

Jiang Suizhou frowned deeper and deeper.

He naturally knew that Huo Wujiu's legs could be cured, but the doctor in his mansion didn't have the ability to do so. He originally thought that it would be enough to wait for the doctor who could cure Huo Wujiu's leg to appear three years later, but he never thought that these three years would be so difficult for Huo Wujiu.

A mere rain had already rendered Huo Wujiu this tortured. The air in Lin’an was humid, and it always rained. Wouldn’t Huo Wujiu suffer three years of punishment in a row?

Jiang Suizhou didn’t say anything for a while.

Doctor Zhou carefully observed his expression and said, “However, if you wrap Madam’s legs with the bedding and a bed warmer[1], it will more or less relieve his pain.”

As soon as Jiang Suizhou heard this, he quickly instructed Meng Qianshan, “Why don’t you go and prepare it?”

Meng Qianshan hurriedly answered and directed the maids to get busy.

Doctor Zhou excused himself, and soon after, the maids brought a heavy quilt over and covered Huo Wujiu’s legs.

Jiang Suizhou asked, “Do you feel any better?”

Huo Wujiu sat on the couch and stared at Jiang Suizhou.

King Jing was still wearing his pajamas. He just put on an outer garment and sat on the chair in front of his couch.

It was late at night, and he was obviously not in good spirits. He looked exhausted, and his complexion was not good. Perhaps because he was sensitive to the cold, Meng Qianshan also gave Jiang Suizhou a hand warmer to warm his hands. He was now unconsciously squeezing the warm fluffy thing in his hand, frowning at him.

Huo Wujiu really didn’t feel if the quilt had any use…He only felt a pressing panic.

Since his legs were disabled, his meridians were not very smooth. His legs were often cold, and even if covered with a quilt, it was difficult to warm them back. Moreover, the dampness was pervasive. If it could penetrate even his flesh, the brocade cotton meant nothing. However, he seemed

reluctant to see King Jing disappointed. Although he felt it was useless deep inside, he perfunctorily said, “Better.”

Sure enough, Jiang Suizhou’s fox-like eyes lit up.

Immediately afterwards, King Jing seemed to have realized what he was holding in his hand and looked down at the warm fluffy hand warmer.

It was white and made of rabbit fur. It was soft, akin to holding a rabbit.

Huo Wujiu watched as King Jing carefully lifted his quilt and placed the white, rabbit-like hand warmer onto his lap.

Then, he paused, as if he thought of something else.

The next moment, a hot hand that had been warmly heated by the hand warmer was placed on his leg and the warmth was felt through his thin layer of Huo Wujiu’s pants. Then Jiang Suizhou rubbed up and down slowly and clumsily, and slowly massaged his legs a few more times.

“This…Is this better?”

Huo Wujiu heard King Jing ask.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t answer him for a while.

Although his legs were crippled, they weren’t without senses.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t perceive whether he was feeling better. He just felt an electric current rushing up from there and numbing half of his body.

Footnote:

1 Tang Po/bed warmer – a copper round pot filled with hot water and placed in the bed to increase the temperature Want to read more chapters and support us? Please consider becoming a patron to read up to 24 chapters in advance!

Chapter 37

Jiang Suizhou was oblivious to Huo Wujiu's reaction. He only felt that the leg he was rubbing under his hand was cold as hell.

He rubbed Huo Wujiu's legs tentatively, and massaged them a few times. The muscles under his palms were rock hard, and it took a lot of effort to massage them. Nevertheless, it seemed that as Jiang Suizhou massaged, Huo Wujiu's legs gradually warmed up a bit.

Jiang Suizhou's eyes lit up.

"Is this any better?" He looked askance at Huo Wujiu.

However, Huo Wujiu sat there with a cold face and didn't speak.

…*Does it mean he's feeling better or not?*

Jiang Suizhou was momentarily baffled, but his hands underneath took action and massaged Huo Wujiu again.

Just then, a hand suddenly grabbed his wrist and pulled his hands out of the quilt.

Jiang Suizhou was startled when he saw those deep black eyes looking at him coldly.

"Why are you touching me?" Huo Wujiu scowled.

He startled Jiang Suizhou, who withdrew his hand posthaste.

He…He just massaged his legs a couple of times; why was he getting angry?!

Jiang Suizhou was stunned, but soon came to his senses.

He forgot that Huo Wujiu's legs were disabled, so he probably hated others touching him. Jiang Suizhou must have been stroking the tiger's whiskers.

For a while, Jiang Suizhou was a little at a loss.

He was inwardly chagrined and didn't notice that Huo Wujiu struggled to support his body on the couch, leaning slightly sideways.

Next to him, Meng Qianshan had already led a group of maids, who found bed warmers for Huo Wujiu, stuffed them, steaming hot, into his blanket, and then withdrew along with them.

Jiang Suizhou also followed suit and stood up.

"…I'm sorry," He apologized and then paused and said, "I didn't mean to touch your legs just now."

Hearing his apology, Huo Wujiu who was on the bed opened his mouth, as if to say something.

A moment later, Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes and said in a low voice, "It's okay. Go to sleep."

Jiang Suizhou sighed with relief when he heard him say that.

Although Huo Wujiu's tone was still quite blunt…this meant that he wouldn't mind him anymore, right?

Jiang Suizhou was not afraid of others being angry with him, but he was afraid of this ancestor. After all, unlike others, when this ancestor got angry, the consequences were fatal.

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou replied and was about to return to his bed when he turned around and said, "This couch is a bit close to the window; why don't you go sleep on the bed?"

Hearing this, Huo Wujiu only closed his eyes and didn't respond to him.

It meant that he was averse to the idea.

Although Jiang Suizhou was still a bit worried, he couldn't force Huo Wujiu to the bed. Seeing that the bedding on him was thick and durable and thinking that it would be of some use, Jiang Suizhou did not insist.

He went back to the bed, changed his robe and lay back under the covers.

Before closing his eyes, he did not forget to remind Huo Wujiu, "If it hurts again, just call out to me."

Huo Wujiu remained silent.

Jiang Suizhou had long been used to talking to this log unilaterally, so after speaking, he closed his eyes again.

Huo Wujiu, who was sitting on the couch, did not move at all.

He waited until Jiang Suizhou's breathing on the bed became steady. He made sure that the man was asleep before raising his hand to lift the quilt covering his legs and dragged out the hot bed warmer while at it.

It was thick and heavy, and covered with a few stove-like stuff, as if for fear of not roasting his legs.

Sure enough, it was a stupid thing that Meng Qianshan did.

Huo Wujiu didn't want to admit that the warmth brought by the thick bedding and the steaming pile of bed warmers were no match for the hand that had clumsily massaged his legs a few times.

But the feelings brought on by those hands were somewhat complicated. Besides warmth, it also added something else, which made him flustered and want to escape immediately.

He even ended up scaring King Jing.

Huo Wujiu's complexion turned ugly, and he tossed several bed warmers out of the quilt.

Until he came across a fluffy thing which Jiang Suizou had stuffed in just now.

He faltered, let go of the little white rabbit and covered it back with the quilt back, letting the little thing snuggle in his lap and softly warm him up.

However, something still seemed to be missing.

A few moments later, Huo Wujiu skeptically placed his hand underneath the bedding and covered his leg, rubbing it a few times.

…*It didn't work at all.*

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Chapter 38

It rained all night, and the sky only cleared up early the next morning.

Jiang Suizhou had slept peacefully all night.

When he woke up early the next morning, the clouds had already dispersed, and the sun reflected the blue sky and shone brightly through the window.

Jiang Suizhou’s gaze immediately fell on the couch under the window.

He saw that the couch was already empty, and Huo Wujiu was sitting on his wheelchair beside it, tidying up his robe.

“Do your legs still hurt?” When Jiang Suizhou spoke, his voice was still raspy from just waking up.

Huo Wujiu looked up at him and said indifferently, “They’re fine.”

With that, he picked up a white object from the couch and raised his hand to toss it.

Seeing that the object was flying straight towards him, Jiang Suizhou nimbly reached out to catch it. But the object was so soft that it passed straight through his hands and landed softly on his bed.

When Jiang Suizhou looked down, he saw that it was the hand warmer that Meng Qianshan stuffed in his blanket yesterday.

The hot water inside had long since lost its heat, except for the fluff on the surface, which carried a faint temperature, like someone’s body heat.

Jiang Suizhou looked up and heard Huo Wujiu faintly say, “Many thanks.”

—— *Oh, he's thanking me for this bed warmer.*

The corners of Jiang Suizhou's mouth couldn't help but curl up into a smile.

He said it. This General Huo Wujiu was indeed a remarkable man. Yesterday, Meng Qianshan clearly gave him so many bed warmers, yet Huo Wujiu still remembered that he gave him this. He even thanked him for it.

"Don't mention it." Jiang Suizhou's voice was tinged with smiles.

Huo Wujiu merely looked at him indifferently and withdrew his gaze coldly.

The sun was getting higher, so Jiang Suizhou rolled over and got off the bed.

Although yesterday was the emperor's birthday banquet and officials of all ranks were to rest today, the Ministry of Rites could not rest. All the things prepared for yesterday's banquet needed to be sorted out and sent to the registry.

Ji You had said that Jiang Suizhou was not well enough to go, but Jiang Suizhou did not want Ji You to make an exception for him. He would just drop by to see if there was anything he could do.

While considering all this, he also thought of the books that Ji You lent him days ago.

The two books of unofficial history were not too thick, so counting the days, he could now return them to Ji You.

With this in mind, he stood up and intended to ask Meng Qianshan to come in.

But at this time, the door was opened in a panic.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes to see Meng Qianshan hastily stumbling in.

“Your Highness, something has happened, Your Highness!” Meng Qianshan immediately reported.

Jiang Suizhou frowned: “What’s happened?”

Meng Qianshan was gasping for breath when he said, “Something has happened to the Ministry of Rites! Just now, someone from the court came to report that Lord Ji You was impeached and taken away by the Ministry of Justice!”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

“On what charge?”

He remembered Ji You’s life, and there should not be such a thing. Although Ji You had no great achievements, his life could be considered smooth-sailing. After the fall of the Jing Dynasty, the Northern Liang originally wanted to recruit him, but he refused. After that, he resigned and returned to his hometown to enjoy the landscape to his heart’s content.

How could he be arrested out of the blue?

Just then, Meng Qianshan said, “An official from the Ministry of Justice said that Lord Ji embezzled the budget on the emperor’s birthday banquet, using second best material and cutting corners. Someone discovered it this morning!”

This was even more unlikely.

Jiang Suizhou frowned: “Has he already been arrested and taken to the Ministry of Justice?”

Meng Qianshan immediately nodded.

Jiang Suizhou’s face turned serious as he raised his hand and said, “Change my clothes.”

Meng Qianshan was stunned: “Your Highness, you are…”

Jiang Suizhou interrupted, “I’m going to the Ministry of Justice.”

Meng Qianshan stomped his feet anxiously when he heard his words: “Why on earth are you going there?! At present, all the officials in the Ministry of Rites are in hiding, fearing that the officials and soldiers will come to their doors. Why are you rushing to go there?”

Jiang Suizhou remained expressionless.

“Cut the crap.”

Meng Qianshan did not dare to defy, so he could only step forward to change Jiang Suizhou’s robes.

Jiang Suizhou’s gaze turned sullen.

He knew that since the Ministry of Rites was in trouble, after arresting Ji You, the officials of the Ministry of Rites were bound to be arrested and interrogated one by one. As a King, taking the initiative to clear himself of suspicion was nothing unusual and would not attract suspicion elsewhere.

But what he wanted to do, naturally, was not to clear his suspicion.

He wanted to know why Ji You, who had not met with a mishap so far, was arrested.

Was it because this was an unofficial history, which was different from the official history? Or because he transmigrated and had contact with Ji You, which had become a variable in Ji You’s life track?

——

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Chapter 39

The news that Jiang Suizhou was going to the Ministry of Justice had already spread. When he got off the carriage, the Minister of Justice was waiting for him outside the door.

When the Minister of Justice saw him get off, he greeted him with a smile and, seeing that Jiang Suizhou was walking weakly, even reached out to help him.

Jiang Suizhou didn't show him any deference and evaded him sideways, as Meng Qianshan was steadily supporting him.

"I've been waiting for Your Highness for a long time. Your Highness, please," the Minister of Justice smiled, moved sideways and said.

Jiang Suizhou spoke indifferently: "You and I are of the same rank, so there is no need to be polite. Besides, I'm here today to be tried."

When the Minister of Justice heard this, he laughed and replied, "What are you talking about, Your Highness? Our Ministry of Justice is investigating this case, but because Your Highness had a sickness some days ago, you had no part in this matter. Even if we want to investigate, we also can not investigate Your Highness…"

Jiang Suizhou raised his hand to put a stop to his speech.

"There are some things that I have handled." He said indifferently. "Even if you do not check, I need to personally ask."

Hearing him say this, the Minister of Justice responded repeatedly and invited him in.

The cause and effect was just an ordinary case of embezzlement. The funds received by the Ministry of Rites were approved by the Ministry of Revenue. The total sum and where it was spent were all recorded in the accounts. However, when sorting the accounts this morning was coming to an end, someone suddenly found that many of the gold and jade arranged as banquet furnishings were all substandard. After accounting for all of it, there was a considerable discrepancy in the numbers.

“Our Ministry of punishment has roughly calculated that Lord Ji has embezzled at least this number!” The Minister of Justice held up for fingers at Jiang Suizhou.

“Be frank, and don’t speak in riddles with me,” Jiang Suizhou said coldly.

The Minister of Justice replied, “At least four thousand taels.”

Four thousand taels, though not an enormous amount, was taken from the emperor’s birthday banquet. Embezzling behind the emperor’s back, no matter if it was only four thousands taels, was a major crime for ordinary officials, with sentences ranging from exile to beheading.

Jiang Suizhou did not say anything.

On the other hand, the Minister of Justice continued chattering, “Your Highness, there is no need to worry. From now on, even if our Ministry of Justice goes to your house to investigate, it will only be a routine check. This matter is mainly about Ji You and has nothing to do with you…”

However, Jiang Suizhou returned lightly, “I need to see Ji You.”
The Minister of Justice was stunned, and a bit of reluctance surfaced on his face.

“This…Ji You is currently being detained…” he faltered.

Jiang Suizhou remained unperturbed.

“There is a batch of raw materials that I took over,” he said. “I need to ask him privately about this matter before I can be at ease.”

Hearing these words, the Minister of Justice probably understood.

Ji You was corrupt, but King Jing wasn't a good man either.

King Jing was probably not at all clean about handling His Majesty's birthday banquet, so he was so anxious and rushed to the Ministry of Justice. Moreover, he also wanted to interrogate Ji You privately.

However, the Minister of Justice had long received an order from the top that this matter today must be settled and pinned on Ji You. Well, it wouldn't be a big deal if His Highness King Jing wanted to pass the blame to Ji You.

After all, what could His Majesty say even if His Highness King Jing, his royal relative, embezzled some silver?

With this thought in mind, the Minister of Justice also put his guard down and reluctantly agreed to take Jiang Suizhou to the Ministry of Justice' prison.

Most of the criminals held in the cells of the Ministry of Justice were those who were still under suspicion, still on trial, or were relatively guilty of minor crimes. Therefore, the security of the Ministry of Justice's prison was not so strict compared with the Imperial Court's Prison. The environment was also better. There were even small windows everywhere for light and ventilation in the cells.

Jiang Suizhou followed the Minister of Justice all the way to the depths of the prison. After turning a corner, he saw Ji You, who was detained in a cell.

Ji You was sitting alone on a straw-covered bed in his cell. As he had only just been imprisoned, his clothes were still tidy, and he was in good spirits.

Hearing someone coming, Ji You lifted his head.

Then he saw Jiang Suizhou, who stopped at the door of the cell and raised his hand to signal the Minister of Justice to go out and wait.

"Err…" The Minister of Justice hesitated.

“Half a stick of an incense,” Jiang Suizhou said.

The Minister of Justice hesitated for a moment and nodded: “Then Your Highness must cut the long story short. I’ll be waiting for you at the entrance of the cell.”

The minister thought to himself: after all, Ji You had already been sent to prison, so His Highness King Jing must have nothing too important to ask him. Ji You was not a high ranking official and did not have any backing, so it would not be worthwhile to provoke King Jing over this trivial matter.

The Minister of Justice retired.

Seeing that he was far away, Jiang Suizhou stepped forward: “Lord Ji.”

Ji You got up from the bed and walked to the door of the cell, staring at Jiang Suizhou through the iron bars.

“Your Highness King Jing..?” He was awashed with disbelief.

Jiang Suizhou paused and said unhurriedly, “…I originally wanted to return your books today.”

His words caught Ji You off guard, and then he smiled bitterly.

“Your Highness doesn’t need to return them,” he said, “Unexpected situations may happen any time, and people have their own destiny. I guess my destiny is right here.”

Jiang Suizhou felt deeply uncomfortable when he saw Ji You’s appearance.

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Chapter 40

“Although I haven’t been deeply involved with you, I also know that you’re not a person who does such things,” Jiang Suizhou paused and said in a deep voice.

Ji You raised his eyes to look at him.

“If the ironclad evidence is there, it doesn’t matter if you did it or not,” Ji You said.

After a pause, he continued.

“Your Highness has always been at odds with Pang’s party, so I can certainly guess a thing or two about today’s incident,” he said. “The people of Pang’s faction have repeatedly tried to befriend me, and I have refused, so I think they must be unhappy. In recent days, I have had some dealings with you, so this time, they must be taking precautions.”

His tone was calm, and he didn’t mean to blame Jiang Suizhou at all. However, the hands that Jiang Suizhou placed by his sides were clenched tighter and tighter.

…*He had guessed right.*

Ji You himself didn’t know, but he knew that for Ji You, he was a drop of calamity from heaven.

The original owner and Ji You did not cross paths. Ji You never wanted to side with any party or group, plus he had no real power in his hand. Pang Shao naturally wouldn’t pay attention to him. However, because of Jiang Suizhou who transmigrated and had a few chats with Ji You, Ji You had some intersections with him. Ji You even took care of Jiang Suizhou

because of his poor health. It was only then that Pang Shao was alerted and thus decided to dispose of Ji You.

Seeing that Jiang Suizhou was silent and did not speak, Ji You froze and then smiled gently.

“Your Highness, you don’t need to blame yourself,” Ji You said, “Ever since I refused to join Pang’s faction, I knew that this day would come sooner or later. I am a lazy person with mediocre natural endowments. I have been an official for more than ten years, but I have not achieved much. Now that I’ve landed myself in this situation, it has nothing to do with you. It’s only because I hold office at court and maintain my dignity alone.”

But Jiang Suizhou, who had been silent for a long time, shook his head.

He raised his eyes to Ji You.

In the dimly lit cell, Ji You met a pair of jet black eyes through the wooden bars.

Those eyes were somewhat white, and coupled with their charm and exquisite outlines, they were downright flattering. But at this time, there was something firm and bright glimmering in his eyes.

“The matter has not been thoroughly investigated, so you will not be immediately convicted.”

Ji You heard Jiang Suizhou’s lowered voice, which carried a natural magnetism.

“Your Excellency, rest well in the prison. I swear that you will not suffer injustice.”

——

The day was getting late, and a light drizzle was falling outside.

Meng Qianshan was a little uneasy. He’d been wandering around at the door of Anyin Hall, repeatedly sending young servants to the door of the

house to ask if his master had come back.

This morning, the King asked his company for a trip to the Ministry of Justice. After he came out of the jail, he looked gloomy and did not say a word.

When they arrived at Changping Street, a mile away from Qinghe Square, the King called the carriage to a halt and got off.

“Don’t let anyone follow me,” the King commanded, “I will return to the residence after a stroll around by myself.”

Meng Qianshan hastily tried to persuade him, but when met with Jiang Suizhou’s cold face, he didn’t dare to speak a word.

Meng Qianshan had no other choice and could only help Jiang Suizhou get out of the carriage, and then send two guards to follow him from afar.

Unexpectedly, the King got off the carriage and never came back.

Seeing that the time was getting late, Meng Qianshan’s heart jumped in his throat.

He hated himself for being too obedient, but this was a habit he ingrained in him since childhood. He was dull, and the King didn’t like him since he was a child, but he also didn’t drive Meng Qianshan away because Meng Qianshan was sent to him by the previous emperor.

Meng Qianshan grew up being cautious and obedient to the King’s orders, thinking that this could make up for his dumb head. It had never occurred to him, however, that he would commit an evil deed because of this.

As he turned around for an unknown number of revolutions, he heard the sound of a wheelchair approaching.

Meng Qianshan looked up and saw that Huo Wujiu had already stopped before him.

“What’s wrong?” He heard Huo Wujiu ask.

Meng Qianshan immediately answered, “Madam, I was too stupid to have let His Highness go out alone. He hasn’t returned yet…”

Huo Wugou raised his eyes and glanced out the door.

The rain was not heavy, but it was drizzling and had not stopped for a long time.

“You are indeed stupid.” Huo Wujiu said.

He spoke in a calm tone, but with an indefinable pressure. Meng Qianshan got scared. He was unable to say anything, looking cautiously at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wugui’s gaze shifted from the rain outside the window to Meng Qianshan’s face.

“It’s so late, so why didn’t you send someone to look for him? What’s the use of circling around here?” His voice was deep and cold.

As if awakening from a dream, Meng Qianshan said repeatedly, “Right, right! How did I forget?!”

While speaking, he immediately rushed into the rain.

But at that moment, a young servant braved the rain and ran all the way into Anyin Hall.

“Eunuch Qianshan, His Highness is back!” Before the servant reached the front of the hall, he reported the news urgently.

Meng Qianshan hurriedly welcomed him to the veranda.

The servant drew closer in a sprint, panting.

“The Highness is back. Although the mansion guard gave him an umbrella, he was still fairly drenched in the rain,” said the servant.

Meng Qianshan asked urgently, “What did His Highness do?”

The servant paused, and his voice weakened. “I don’t know where His Highness went…he drank too much wine,” he whispered.

——

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Chapter 41

Jiang Suizhou didn’t expect that his body was not only weak, but also had a poor drinking capacity.

After he came out of the Ministry of Justice, he felt suffocated in his heart.

Although he had guessed early in the morning that Ji You’s imprisonment was related to him, guessing the truth and seeing it with his own two eyes were completely different.

Ji You was a living and breathing being, even an unconventional and unrestrained, talented master poet. Just because of only a few moments of goodwill to him, Ji You was implicated and was sent to prison, with his future uncertain and even his life and death unknown.

And all this was because of Pang Shao.

For Jiang Suizhou, Pang Shao was just a treacherous minister recorded in history books, but now he was a villain with a butcher’s knife in hand, casting his greedy eyes on his prey and eager to persecute the people around him at any time.

Jiang Suizhou actually naively thought that he could temporarily circumvent him and survive these three years.

Jiang Suizhou felt like a boulder was weighing down on his heart, making him feel out of breath.

He wanted to find a place to vent his frustration, but he had just transmigrated and didn’t even know anyone he could talk to. He just held on until the carriage drove through Changping Street.

Changping Street was full of merchants and people, coming and going. It was very lively. The smoke from the restaurants curled up. People passed by, and the merchants shuttled to and fro, giving the impression of a peaceful and quiet world that was completely different from the noble and cold King Jing Mansion.

Jiang Suizhou called the carriage to a stop there and walked away.

At that second, he felt desperate to get away from King Jing's identity, from this world, and return to the multitude of people to which he originally belonged.

However, there was nowhere for him to be accepted by the masses.

He walked aimlessly on Changping Street. People came and went around him, but he seemed to be clearly isolated.

After walking for a while, Jiang Suizhou raised his head and saw a fluttering wine flag.

He went to the wine shop, asked for some wine, and drank alone until late at night.

The wine was not strong, but was a common southern apricot wine. It had its own sweet aroma and wasn't intoxicating. But when Jiang Suizhou got up, he felt dizzy. His feet felt floaty, and he was already drunk.

He propped himself up on the table and stood firm.

It was fine to be drunk, he said to himself. He had had enough of being sober day after day since he transmigrated here.

He staggered out of the wine shop and walked step by step back to the royal residence.

It started raining outside at some point. It wasn't heavy, and he didn't mind getting wet in the rain. When he reached the door of the royal residence, he realized afterwards that someone had been holding an umbrella behind him.

When he looked back, he saw a guard who he had never met before. Seeing him looking at himself, the guard's legs went weak, and he almost dropped to his knees before him.

Jiang Suizhou frowned and waved his hand sluggishly.

Yes, here he was, just the King of Jing who was feared like a tiger and wolf.

Someone brought a palanquin, but he didn't climb up. He trudged on the wet stone brick ground all the way back to the Anyin Hall.

He had just entered the courtyard gate when he saw Meng Qianshan, braving the rain and running all the way towards him.

"Your Highness!" Meng Qianshan was so anxious that his voice trembled. "Where have you been? You scared me…"

"Didn't you send someone to follow me." Jiang Suizhou's voice sounded a little dumb.

Meng Qianshan was startled and thought that Jiang Suizhou was going to blame him.

But before he could speak, Jiang Suizhou raised his hand.

He walked straight up the steps, stopped at the bottom of the porch, and turned back to say, "Don't mind me, wait outside the door."

Meng Qianshan ventured nothing but responded affirmatively.

Jiang Suizhou lifted his feet and entered the room. He closed the door, took a few steps forward, and leaned on the side partition.

He then titled his head up, closed his eyes, and took a few deep breaths.

When he woke up from this drunken sleep tomorrow, he would need to plan how to absolve Ji You of his charges.

But right now, he just wanted to be alone for a while.

He closed his eyes and leaned there for a while until he gradually calmed down in the dizzying punch of the wine, and then slowly opened his eyes.

Then he saw a person sitting in front of him, quietly looking at him.

Jiang Suizhou looked at the man, stunned, and then gave an unguarded, drunken smile.

“There you are,” he said lethargically, “I’ve forgotten.”

Then he saw Huo Wujiu open his mouth and ask, “Why did you drink so much?”

Jiang Suizhou shook his head with a smile and said, “I didn’t drink much. It’s all because I can’t hold my liquor.”

Huo Wujiu frowned.

Jiang Suizhou was indeed drunk.

His face was flushed, and his gaze was lax. His robe was still wet, and although the upper half of his body hadn’t gotten wet, the hem of his robe and the legs of his trousers were damp with water.

Huo Wujiu said, “Go change your clothes first.”

Jiang Suizhou smiled, raised his hand and rubbed the corner of his forehead. He uttered an “oh”, and then straightened up on the partition.

However, he had been leaning on the partition for too long, and because the booze had already soaked his mind, he had not much strength. After he took a step, his feet softened, and he dove straight forward.

Jiang Suizhou later registered that he was falling.

But he was too slow to react, and couldn’t promptly, so he fell straight to the ground.

However, the pain that he had expected did not befall him, and instead, he fell on a hard warmth.

He opened his eyes drunkenly, and saw Huo Wujiu’s handsome face well within reach. His dark eyes were staring at him quietly from very close by.

Huo Wujiu caught him.

He was lying in Huo Wujiu’s arms, and because of how he supported his body, Huo Wujiu’s action at this time was like embracing him into his arms.

Jiang Suizhou was unaware of it.

Looking at Huo Wujiu’s face, he paused as if he remembered something and asked slowly.

“Do your legs still hurt today?”

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Chapter 42

Huo Wujiu didn’t know how Highness King Jing, who obviously got frustrated outside and came back alone drunk, had time to care about whether his legs hurt or not.

However, this person was lying softly in his arms. Jiang Suizhou’s eyes were lax, staring at Huo Wujiu drunkenly, which immediately softened the latter’s heart. It was as if Jiang Suizhou was gently poking on his soft spot.

It seemed that his scent had gotten him somewhat intoxicated too.

Huo Wujiu paused and whispered, “It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

Jiang Suizhou was still staring at him when he said, “But it’s raining outside.”

Huo Wujiu took a deep breath.

For the first time, he felt that a drunk person was difficult to deal with, but also for the first time, he felt that, while this man was clearly so difficult to manage, he was not annoying at all.

He patiently and slowly said, “So you got wet. Get up and go change your clothes.”

Jiang Suizhou paused before he said as an afterthought, “Oh…I got wet.”

With a casual push of his hand, he propped himself up on Huo Wujiu’s shoulder and struggled to stand up. But once drunk people lost their strength, it would be difficult to get that strength back, so he tried several times, all in vain.

Back and forth, it was akin to rubbing himself coquettishly in Huo Wujiu's arms.

Huo Wujiu's face gradually became a little ugly.

All of a sudden, Jiang Suizhou felt a hand holding his arm tightly, lifting him upwards and picking him straight up.

Then, the man carried him in just one hand, while his other hand rolled his wheelchair. Huo Wujiu supported him all the way. He brought Jiang Suizhou to the bedside, and with the one hand carrying him, pressed him to sit on the bed.

"Change your clothes first," the man said.

Jiang Suizhou let him carry him all the way, only to feel a dizzy spell on his head. When he sat down in bed, he somehow couldn't tell southeast from northwest.

But he was obedient. When he heard Huo Wujiu's order, Jiang Suizhou clumsily peeled off his soaked outer robe and casually tossed it to the floor.

"I'm not that wet…" While stripping, he also muttered under his breath.

After completing that task, he had no more strength and leaned sickly to the side against the bedpost.

Seeing that Jiang Suizhou's inner clothes were dry and he most likely wouldn't catch a cold, Huo Wujiu didn't force him anymore. He pressed the wheelchair under his hand to go back to his own couch.

But he heard Jiang Suizhou, who was leaning against the bed, sigh softly.

The sigh was very soft, but Huo Wujiu could hear the exhaustion and bewilderment Jiang Suizhou was trying to hide.

Huo Wujiu came to a stop, and the hand that was supposed to roll his wooden wheel also stopped in its place.

He turned his head sideways and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

Huo Wujiu saw Jiang Suizhou leaning sideways, his forehead against the bed frame. His eyes were drooping pensively, and he didn't utter a single word.

The surroundings were quiet under the warmth of the lamp. Beautiful pearls and jades were everywhere. The man was clearly sitting in his territory, but he seemed to float in the void with no one to rely on.

"…What's wrong?" Huo Wujiu, who had never been nosy, asked for some reason.

It took Jiang Suizhou a moment to realize that Huo Wujiu was talking to him.

He opened his eyes, and under the candle flames, those eyes were flooded with starry watery light.

"I've harmed someone." Speaking of this, his voice choked a little. "He was framed because of me."

Huo Wugou most likely knew who he was referring to. After all, he was also present when Meng Qianshan rushed in early this morning.

"It has nothing to do with you," Huo Wujiu said.

Even though he had been in the military for many years, he knew that some innocent people would always be sacrificed in the struggle to frame each other at court. Even if some people were not sacrificed because of Jiang Suizhou, it would be very difficult for them to wisely protect their own hide.

Jiang Suizhou shook his head. "It's my fault," he said, "I must get him out."

Speaking of which, a thought seemed to have occurred to him. His eyes blinked, and a tear suddenly rolled down from his eyes.

Huo Wujiu panicked for no reason, and his movements were rather cramped.

As the tear slid down, Huo Wujiu's eyebrows wrinkled tightly. His hand on his knee was also clenched into a fist.

"If you want to save him, save him. Why are you crying?" Huo Wujiu said. After a pause, he added, "Is it because you don't know how to save him?"

Although Huo Wujiu didn't know much about Southern Jing's imperial court, corruption cases had always been very flexible. After all, the flow of a sum of money had to go through many people's hands. It was not too difficult to save a person who was originally slandered.

Jiang Suizhou, however, shook his head and raised his eyes to Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou didn't seem to notice that he was crying. Now that he was looking tearfully at Huo Wujiu, he didn't even wipe the teardrops from his face.

Such a gaze directed at Huo Wujiu made his chest a little tight. But for some reason, his heart became inexplicably active, one beat followed another, pounding especially fiercely. After staring at Huo Wujiu for a while, Jiang Suizhou sighed softly.

"Huo Wujiu, when will your leg heal?"

Huo Wujiu had no expression on his face, but his clenched jaw betrayed some emotions.

…When people got drunk, their speech would become incoherent.

One moment Jiang Suizhou said he was going to save an unrelated person, and the next he wanted to heal his legs. Now that this man was drunk, he acted as if he could manage all other people's business under the heavens.

However, Huo Wujiu was not too bothered when Jiang Suizhou's concern was on him.

He seemed to have gotten used to this silly rabbit’s stupid habit of putting him first in everything.

A moment of silence later, Huo Wujiu lifted his hand and stretched his rough knuckles to wipe off the tears hanging on Jiang Suizhou’s face, as if to wipe away those things that made him worried.

“It’s alright,” he said, “Sleep.”

——

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Chapter 43

Though drunk Jiang Suizhou was incoherent, he was obedient. When Huo Wujiu told him to sleep, he lay down obediently and let Huo Wujiu put down the bed curtains for him and extinguish the lights in the room.

While lying in bed, Jiang Suizhou's thoughts were still in a mess. How great would it be if Huo Wujiu's legs healed right away?

He would let him kill Pang Shao quickly and change the course of history, so that the latter's pawns would die an early death.

With that in mind, Jiang Suizhou dizzily fell asleep.

He slept for a long time, and when he opened his eyes again, the sky was already bright.

The sun shining on Jiang Suizhou's face made him squint. He had a headache and got dizzy when he sat up.

…I drank too much yesterday.

He could only recall memories from when he was still in the wine shop. When he had left out and let the cold wind blow on him, his thoughts were jumbled. Jiang Suizhou sat on the bed and rubbed his head, but he couldn't remember how he got back to the house yesterday.

Right on cue, Meng Qianshan came in.

Seeing that Jiang Suizhou had already woken up, Meng Qianshan hastily ordered a maid to bring hangover soup while he greeted him, "Your Highness, you're awake."

Jiang Suizhou rubbed his temples and nodded.

Meng Qianshan said, “Where is Your Highness uncomfortable? It’s early in the day, so you can sleep a little longer. Officials from the Ministry of Justice have now gone to the Ministry of Rites to investigate the case. Early this morning, an official came to report that you don’t have to go to work today.”

Hearing the words Ministry of Rites, Jiang Suizhou paused, but shook his head.

“No more sleeping,” he said.

Meng Qianshan hastily responded, took the hangover soup handed to him by a maid nearby and delivered it to Jiang Suizhou’s hand.

“Your Highness, have a bowl of soup first,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou answered and picked up the soup.

After a few mouthfuls of soup, his spirit indeed cleared and brightened in a few moments, and his vision wasn’t as blurry.

He then began to ruminate about Ji You’s matter.

Ji You was imprisoned because of him, so he must not ignore, but with his pathetic power at present, there weren’t people that he could mobilize and rely on. Pang Shao’s spearhead was now pointing directly at Ji You. With his weak forces facing the enemy’s strong ones, it was honestly very challenging.

Therefore, he must find every advantage he could use, try to start from the shadows, and attack his opponents by surprise.

If that was the case…he might have to utilize the two “concubines” in his house.

Gu Changyun seemed to be quick witted. Although he was not loyal, Jiang Suizhou had blackmail in his hands; Xu Du had spoken to him frankly and

was also raising some dead soldiers for him. If he wanted to attack from the dark, these people might come in handy…

Just then, Jiang Suizhou heard the sound of a banging wheelchair.

He looked up and saw Huo Wujiu, who had just finished washing up and was coming out of the back room. The hair on his forehead was damp with some water droplets, and when the sun shone, they glistened.

Feeling Jiang Suizhou watching him, Huo Wujiu turned his head and frankly locked eyes with him.

“Awake?” He heard Huo Wujiu ask.

That was right…he came back drunk yesterday and couldn’t even recall what he had done, but Huo Wujiu had always been in this room. Presumably, he knew exactly what Jiang Suizhou did yesterday.

Jiang Suizhou was a little worried, but still uncertain. He carefully surveyed Huo Wujiu’s expression.

He shouldn’t have said anything that shouldn’t be said, right?

Perhaps the sun was pleasant today, because when he looked at Huo Wujiu’s inscrutable face, he felt that the latter was in a good mood.

He probably didn’t provoke him yesterday.

This time, Jiang Suizhou was relieved. Meng Qianshan waited on Jiang Suizhou as he changed his clothes and robes and removed the smell of alcohol from his body. Then Jiang Suizhou sat down comfortably at the table.

Huo Wujiu sat opposite him.

The two had been living together for some days and had developed some natural tacit understanding on trivial things. The daylight outside the window was bright, and they had their breakfast without saying a word. In a while, a touch of tranquility and warmth settled in the air.

Jiang Suizhou's appetite was not good because of last night's wine, and he only drank half a bowl of porridge before setting down his chopsticks.

Meng Qianshan hurriedly went forward, and while handing him a copper basin for washing hands, he asked, "Your Highness, will you go to the office or to the study later?"

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment and remembered what he had intended to do this morning.

The matter should not be delayed.

"Neither," he answered, "Send someone to Gu Changyun's courtyard now and inform him that I will go to his place later. Let him prepare."

Um…early in the morning?

Meng Qianshan cautiously glanced at Jiang Suizhou then at Huo Wujiu. He responded cautiously, and then withdrew.

Jiang Suizhou picked up the tea on the table and took a sip.

But before that sip of tea entered his mouth, a crips clang echoed. It wasn't resounding, but it's abruptness caused Jiang Suizhou's hands to shake with fright.

He looked up and saw Huo Wujiu expressionlessly putting down his bowl. Then, he turned the direction of his wheelchair and expressionlessly left on his own.

…He's done eating?

Jiang Suizhou looked at the bowl Huo Wujiu placed on the table.

Huo Wujiu had always had a good appetite, and the rice in his bowl was usually never wasted. But today, he had a large portion of porridge left in his bowl, and the main course on the table was only half eaten.

Jiang Suizhou turned his head in surprise and looked at Huo Wujiu, who had entered the bedroom.

He thought Huo Wujiu was in a good mood just now. Why did he suddenly look sullen, as if someone had provoked him?

—-

The author has something to say: Jiang Suizhou straight guy three companies: Angry? So what? What did I do?

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Chapter 44

Jiang Suizhou initially wanted to ask Huo Wujiu why he was angry, but when the words reached his mouth, he couldn’t utter them.

After all, Huo Wujiu was poker-faced every day. In real terms, no one could tell whether he was happy or angry. What if he wasn’t angry at all when Jiang Suizhou asked? Wouldn’t that be too embarrassing?

Thus, Jiang Suizhou gave him a couple of glances, but swallowed the words that wanted to escape from his lips.

After eating breakfast and changing clothes, he went straight to Gu Changyun’s courtyard.

Like every time before, Gu Changyun and Xu Du were waiting in the room together.

They were about to get up and salute him when they saw Jiang Suizhou waving his hand and sitting down at the main seat.

“Sit,” he ordered lightly.

The two looked at each other and sat down on the chairs beside him.

“Yesterday, Lord Ji was arrested for embezzlement. You both should have known about this, right?” Jiang Suizhou said.

The two nodded.

Next to him, Gu Changyun said with a smile, “Your Highness, there is no need to worry. This Lord Ji has never stood on our side, and we have

persuaded him several times to no avail. Now that Pang Shao has disposed of him, there is no damage to us, so you don't need to take it to heart."

Jiang Suizhou looked at him and said bluntly, "I want to save him."

Gu Changyun was stunned.

Then, he smiled and said, "I'm naturally happy that Your Highness is kind-hearted. It's just that…"

"Xu Du," Jiang Suizhou abruptly interrupted him.

Xu Du answered, "Your Highness."

Jiang Suizhou looked at Xu Du: "Did you still not tell him anything?"

Xu Du was taken aback, and then understood what Jiang Suizhou was talking about. Xu Du gently smiled and said, "Without Your Highness's order, I don't dare to speak."

Jiang Suizhou hummed and said, "Gu Changyun, now that you are under my command, your grandmother and younger sister will also be kept in the mansion, which is safer."

Gu Changyun froze, and the smile on his face also gradually disappeared into thin air.

"Your Highness?"
Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and looked at him.

"I, unlike him, have no intention of detaining your family. But since they are already living in the royal residence, there is no need for them to move out. From now on, if you want to see them, you can just go to that courtyard," Jiang Suizhou said.

Gu Changyun went rigid for a moment, and gradually, his eyes turned reddish.

He had never mentioned it to others, but since his family was threatened and forced into the royal residence by King Jing, he had not been able to see his family again until now.

"…Your Highness is kind-hearted and wants to save him, so naturally I will do my best." A few moments later, Gu Changyun said to Jiang Suizhou with red eyes and a smile.

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

His two subordinates were smart people. He didn't have to be too direct. Pointing them to the destination would suffice.

The two had guessed that he wasn't the original owner, and now, Jiang Suizhou had confessed the bargaining chip that the original owner had used to blackmail Gu Changyun, which was a way to show the latter his sincerity: Jiang Suizhou would help him take care of his family, and would not use them as blackmail.

After all, Gu Changyun had already entered his house and had become tied to him. At this juncture, there was no turning back for him. Only with this arrangement could he get the best result for himself.

Seeing that Gu Changyun understood, Jiang Suizhou said bluntly, "It's not just my kindness."

He looked at the two of them.

"Pang Shao now covers the sky with one hand, and if he wants to deal with any minister, he can do so without effort," Jiang Suizhou said. "I thought that if we let him kill Ji You today, he can kill whoever he wants tomorrow. Today, many ministers are waiting for my protection. If I can't even protect one person, I'm afraid that the others, too, will become dissidents."

After a pause, he continued.

"Of course, deep inside, I also want to save one and count one. I can't let Pang Shao keep getting what he wants."

Hearing this from him, Xu Du frowned.

“It is naturally a good thing that Your Highness can think this way,” he said, “However… Does Your Highness have a solution at present?”

Gu Changyun followed suit and nodded.

“Pang Shao’s faction has no shortage of people in the Ministry of Rites. Contriving a fictitious sum of embezzled money and blaming it on Lord Ji is as easy as a pie. However, if we want to exonerate Lord Ji from it, there is still nowhere to start.”

Jiang Suizhou paused. “It’s easy to pin the blame on him, but the whereabouts of the stolen money…should we also check it?” he asked.

Gu Changyun nodded. “That goes without saying. But according to the Great Jing’s current laws, even if the whereabouts of the embezzled money cannot be traced, the perpetrator must be convicted when he should be convicted.”

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment.

Gu Changyun was right. Throughout the ages, there had been countless cases of corruption, of which many people had been convicted in careless search for a lead.

So, what advantage did he have as a latecomer?

Jiang Suizhou fell silent for a long time, and his two subordinates also looked grave. For a while, no one spoke.

After a long time, Xu Du spoke unhurriedly. “Now that the case has reached this point, the only way to save Lord Ji is to find a scapegoat,” he proposed, “But…you can no longer frame a good man.”

Hearing this, Jiang Suizhou’s eyes lit up.

A scapegoat?

He had an epiphany.

Of course the court couldn’t trace the whereabouts of the imposed embezzled money. However, what if he could find the money for the court?

After all, he studied the history of Jing. Although he couldn’t recite the biographies of the officials in the dynasty backward by heart, he was still clear about what kind of things each of them had done.

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Chapter 45

He had more or less kept an account in his mind, including those who played favorites and embezzled.

From these officials, he would find one who was much more greedy and was in the Ministry of Rites, and then draw the attention of the officials of the Ministry of Justice to that person. By then, the embezzled goods would be retrieved and Ji You would escape the jaws of danger.

Jiang Suizhou hastened to speak.

“That’s an excellent solution,” he said.

Xu Du was taken aback. “Does Your Highness already have a candidate in mind?”

His question earned a light smile from Jiang Suizhou.

Of course he had. Not only was he a good candidate, but also someone who hit his muzzle.

Chen Ti.

He curried favor with Pang Shao and indeed dredged up a lot of benefits from his relationship with him. It just so happened that before Jiang Suizhou transmigrated, a colleague happened to have written a paper on corruption at the end of the Jing Dynasty, in which Chen Ti was mentioned. He could even remember clearly that he had purchased several large mansions in Lin’an City.

Didn’t he also want to invite Huo Wujiu to appreciate the flowers?

Why didn’t he also invite the officials of the Ministry of Justice to come appreciate the mansion he purchased?

——

Jiang Suizhou consulted the two and schemed until the afternoon. After their plan was fully laid out and they made sure that there was no flaw, the three took a break and had some food together.

During the meal, Xu Du asked curiously, “How does Your Highness know so much about Chen Ti’s family assets?”

Jiang Suizhou smiled faintly.

“I have my own way,” Jiang Suizhou answered indifferently.

He couldn’t tell these two that he came from a thousand years later and also happened to be dedicated to studying them, right?

However, Gu Changyun laughed at his reply.

“Do you still have to ask?” He smiled. “Isn’t it all written in the script? People like His Highness…have more or less different abilities from us. Even if you wish to know these, you probably wouldn’t understand.”

Listening to his jest, Jiang Suizhou smiled and knocked his chopsticks on the back of Gu Changyun’s hand.

After the three bantered around for a few minutes, Jiang Suizhou paused and said, “However, I have another matter.”

The two people looked at him.

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment, and said, “I want to find a way to cure Huo Wujiu’s legs.”

For a time, the two men looked at each other, but neither of them said anything.

A few moments later, Xu Du asked, “Your Majesty…why so?”

Jiang Suizhou slowly said, “I’m well aware that Pang Shao’s roots are deep and the emperor is absurd and dim-witted. What can really bring them down completely is not us, but the Northern Liang.”

Upon hearing this, the two were silent for a moment.

Gu Changyun said, “Although…that’s indeed accurate, have you considered it for yourself?”

Jiang Suizhou looked at him.

He heard Gu Changyun add, “Pang Shao is our enemy, but the Northern Liang is also our enemy. How can you conclude that Huo Wujiu will kill Pang Shao, but not you?”

Hearing his question, Jiang Suizhou was rendered speechless for a moment.

He had been thinking about this matter since this morning. He knew that after three years, everything in Southern Jing would disappear because of Huo Wujiu, but he didn’t want to really wait these three years in silence and tangle with Pang Shao for three years.

He wanted to shorten this time.

But, like Gu Changyun said, what guarantee did he have that Huo Wujiu would not kill him?

In his innermost being, he firmly believed for some reason that he would. But when he heard Gu Changyun questioning him, he found that the matter of Huo Wujiu killing him sounded quite absurd.

Was it because Huo Wujiu had been too amiable toward him during this period?

After a long time, Jiang Suizhou spoke up.

“There’s still time,” he said. “As long as we can cure him, then I can guarantee it.”

He had never gambled or bet before, but what he said at this time was a real bet.

His heart even gave birth to a conviction that only a gambler would have at this moment.

Jiang Suizhou felt that he would not lose.

He quietly surveyed the two people in front of him.

After a long silence, Gu Changyun took the lead and sighed.

“Since Your Highness is so sure, then I’ll also believe in you,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou nodded slowly.

Gu Changyun continued, “Since we want to cure him, we need to find a famous doctor. However, there is a need to announce a reason for our search for a doctor in the world.”

Jiang Suizhou agreed.

“I do have a solution,” Gu Changyun said.

Jiang Suizhou nodded his head, signaling for him to go on.

Then he heard Gu Changyun say, “Your Highness is already in poor health, but it can now become an advantage. If word gets out from the mansion, say that because of the incident at the Ministry of Rites, Your Highness was worried. You got drenched yesterday, returned to the mansion after a few hours in the rain, and fell ill. That way, looking for a doctor would be justified.”

This man was indeed quick-witted.

Jiang Suizhou nodded, pondered for a moment, and then frowned. “But, if we want to say so, I will certainly have to get sick. The emperor and Pang Shao are keeping a close eye on me. If I am ill, they will certainly be the first to send people to investigate.”

Gu Changyun laughed.

“Did Your Highness forget where I came from?”

Jiang Suizhou was taken aback: “The brothel?”

Gu Changyun nodded.

“I also learned some unorthodox medical prescriptions there. Although they can’t cure people, they can also make people look sick, and ordinary doctors cannot diagnose them.”

Jiang Suizhou was quite amazed.

“Is there such a thing?” He said, “Then if you can do so, ensure that everything will be safe. When the doctors in the mansion aren’t able to cure me, the mansion can naturally post a notice seeking a doctor. You two can then sift through them and find the one that can cure Huo Wujiu.”

Gu Changyun nodded.

“However, that being the case…” he faltered.

“What?” Jiang Suizhou looked at him.

Gu Changyun smiled ambiguously.

“It takes some time to administer the medicine. Moreover, for external prescriptions, you need to soak in a bathtub… In this case, you will have to suffer a bit, Your Highness. You will spend these next two nights in my room.”

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Chapter 46

The Emperor was really in a good mood these days.

Though the court had been in chaos recently and the entire Ministry of Rites had been checked over and over again, and even the court was a bit of a mess, but with his uncle handling it for him, even if this kind of triviality stirred up the skies, it wouldn't sour his mood.

Therefore, the emperor did not care which officials were arrested from the Ministry of Rites.

However, his uncle told him that the official had embezzled money from his birthday banquet, which was a great disrespect to him. Therefore, the corrupt official must be severely punished.

The Emperor didn't care whether the culprit was severely punished or not. If anything, in order to compensate him, his uncle stealthily found him two Yangzhou skinny horses[1], changed their names and disguised them as noble women, and then stuffed them into his harem.

Women who came out of brothels had a charm that women from noble families lacked. Hence, the emperor, who got intoxicated in his pleasure harem[2] recently, felt that since his uncle said the culprit would be severely punished, it must be right. Severe punishment it was.

Then, within two days, an even bigger good news reached his ears.

His consumptive Fifth Brother suddenly had a high fever and couldn't get up from bed.

The emperor was so happy to hear this that he immediately jumped up from his pleasure harem and sent an imperial doctor to King Jing's residence to see if his brother's illness would kill him.

It didn't take long for the imperial doctor to return and report on the completion of his task.

"His Highness King Jing does not have a fever," the imperial doctor started.

When the imperial doctor came, Pang Shao was accompanying the Emperor to play a trick-taking card game[3]. Upon hearing this, the two's complexions turned ugly.

"What's wrong with him then?" Pang Shao put down the cards in his hand and asked in a deep voice.

Then they heard the doctor continue, "Although he's not feverish, he's bedridden. I've diagnosed His Highness's pulse, and I believe it is a weakness caused by palpitation and restlessness, plus weakness caused by excessive drinking and the cold."

Hearing these words, Pang Shao went into deep thought.

The Emperor said discontentedly, "Then why did he report to me that he's got a fever? He's already so sick, yet he still made an effort to deceive me. He's got the nerve…"

But then, Pang Shao raised his hand: "Your Majesty."

"Uncle?" The Emperor looked at Pang Shao.

Then he saw Pang Shao's pensive face gradually reveal a hint of a smile.

"If I have not guessed wrongly… the secrets in this matter perhaps call more for Your Majesty's rejoicing," he said.

"Why?" The emperor was puzzled.

Pang Shao replied, "Does Your Majesty know Ji You?"

The Emperor thought for a long time before he could barely recall the somewhat familiar name: “Ah, the official who embezzled my money?”

Pang Shao smiled and nodded.

“On the morning when he was detained, King Jing hurriedly went to the Ministry of Punishment’s prison and met him in private,” Pang Shao informed.

The Emperor frowned: “What happened after?”

Pang Shao grinned and looked at him.

“Then, His Highness King Jing braved the rain and got drunk alone. Within two days, he fell ill. Your Majesty, what do you think this ‘palpitation and restlessness’ of his could be due to?”

After thinking for a long time, traces of surprise gradually surfaced on the Emperor’s face.

“Are you saying that…he must have embezzled as well and is afraid that he will be investigated?”

Pang Shao smiled and nodded, but still he said, “I am only guessing.”

The Emperor’s eyes almost burst out with excitement.

“Then why don’t you go quickly and have someone investigate him?!” He said, “As a minister, he actually dared to swindle me. Do you think this can be considered deceiving the king and wanting to rebel?”

The more the Emperor spoke, the more excited he became, as if he could sentence Jiang Suizhou to death on the spot. Speaking of this, he excitedly slammed the card in his hand on the couch and said, “Uncle, let me investigate this matter, alright?”

Pang Shao looked at him.

He knew best how much His Majesty hated his Fifth Royal Brother.

In those years, the late emperor did not have an abundance of children, and several of his sons died at a young age. Only the fifth born to the late emperor’s beloved imperial concubine was raised on his knee and cared for in every way, so he didn’t suffer at all.

On the contrary, although His Majesty was the first son back then, he was transparent in the eyes of the previous emperor and had never received his attention. People in the palace had always been snobbish. They bowed to the high and trampled on the low. When His Majesty was young, Pang Shao knew how much injustice he had suffered and how much he hated his Fifth Royal Brother.

Therefore, if he wanted to please His Majesty, there was nothing wrong with making a move on King Jing.

However, King Jing was also a descendant of the royal family. Although Pang Shao could torment and insult him, it was not so easy to get him killed. Now, even if the embezzlement case was found on Jiang Suizhou’s head, and he was indeed found guilty; even if he was found to be corrupt, he could not be convicted of any capital felony.

That being the case, he’d better hand him over to His Majesty and please him with a cricket-fighting pleasure.

With that in mind, Pang Shao gently smiled.

“His Majesty, King Jing is noble. I do not dare to overstep my bounds,” he said.

“Since Your Majesty wants to investigate the case, I will immediately deploy my staff and be at Your Majesty’s disposal.”

——

Footnote:

1 Thin/Skinny horses – a term from the Yuan Dynasty referring to beautiful girls bought from poor families. Buyers will then let them study, teach them

to sing and dance, to play chess and calligraphy, and then to sell them to rich men as concubines or brothels to profit from them.

2 Pleasure town/harem – (Wenrou township/gentle township) – a metaphor for a place of women's charm **3** Madiao – also known as the game of *paper tiger*

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Chapter 47

Once rain started in the south of the Yangtze River, it poured incessantly.

Since the day the King went to Madam Gu's courtyard and fell ill and bedridden, the drizzle outside fell non-stop for a few days without any signs of sunshine.

Coupled with the atmosphere in Anyin Hall, everything also became gloomy, which made people feel suffocated.

The victim who bore the brunt the most was Meng Qianshan.

The last time he experienced this kind of pressure was when the King went to spend the night at Madam Xu's. But this time, it seemed much more serious than the previous time. Hence, he was alarmed and on eggshells all day in Anyin Hall but couldn't pinpoint the cause.

Deep inside, he thought he must let His Highness return.

However, His Highness stayed at Madam Gu's place for one day, and stayed for a second day immediately afterwards.

This was something that had never happened before.

On the third day, His Highness would surely return no matter what happened, right?

But to his surprise, on the third night, news of His Highness's illness came from Gu Changyun.

Meng Qianshan was so anxious that he promptly rushed to Gu Changyun's courtyard. It never occurred to him that King Jing would bar him from

entering.

The person who threw him out was Gu Changyun.

Gu Changyun was leaning against the door frame and looking quite gorgeous and charming clad in red. Seeing Meng Qianshan being stopped at the door and anxiously pacing in circles, Gu Changyun smiled and said, “What’s the rush? His Highness only drank too much wine these two days and is somewhat deficient in health. You just have to send the news to the palace and the Ministry of Rites and ask for a few days’ leave for His Highness. As for the rest…just take care of Madam Huo for His Highness.”

“This…” Meng Qianshan looked in anxiously.

Gu Changyun raised his hand and blocked his gaze.

“His Highness has orders not to let you in,” he said, “Ah, has it been raining for the past few days? His Highness ordered you to go back quickly, boil dilong extract[4] in An Yin Hall, and burn some fire. Don’t neglect that cripple.”

After speaking, he arrogantly glanced at Meng Qianshan, turned around, and shut the door.

In the room, Jiang Suizhou was lying on the bed. His breath was uneven, and his face was a bit white.

“Have you given my orders?” he asked.

Gu Changyun stood at the edge of the bed and nodded.

Jiang Suizhou closed his eyes.

He didn’t let Meng Qianshan in, purely because he was afraid the latter would talk too much and ask something he shouldn’t ask.

He initially thought that after these two days, he would go back to Anyin Hall, but never expected that the effect of the medicine would strike so

suddenly and fiercely and make it so that he could not get up, let alone return to his own courtyard.

Gu Changyun comforted him on the side, “Don’t worry, Your Highness. After the first few days, the effect of this medicine will gradually become milder. By then, the symptoms that manifest will simply be having a weaker constitution due to palpitations.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded on the bed.

“Tomorrow, when the palace gets the news, they will send someone over,” he said.

Gu Changyun nodded and said, “Yes. After the imperial doctor from the palace diagnoses you, let him administer medicine. You naturally can not be cured from that, and we can post a notice to seek medical help under that pretext.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded and closed his eyes.

Seeing that he wanted to rest, Gu Changyun sensibly retreated to the outer room.

However, the atmosphere in Anyin Hall, where boiling of the dilong extract was in full swing, was one of condensation.

The servants and maids were busy going in and out, trying to finish the dilong extract for the night and burn some fire to drive away the dampness in the room. The man who was standing beside Huo Wujiu, Meng Qianshan, prudently kept his mouth shut and dared not utter a word.

Huo Wujiu was holding a book in his hand, but hesitated to turn the pages.

“Speak if you have anything to say,” he coldly said.

Meng Qianshan whispered, “Madam Gu said in the courtyard…that His Highness is bedridden, so he’s going to rest there.”

Huo Wujiu did not move.

A moment later, he asked in a light voice, “What kind of illness?”

Meng Qianshan lost his tongue for a moment.

Huo Wujiu waited for a while but didn’t hear him make a sound. A moment later, he raised his eyes, a pair of dark, bottomless eyes, and stared quietly at Meng Qianshan.

“Speak,” he commanded.

Those eyes sent chills down Meng Qianshan’s spine. He trembled all over and hurriedly responded, “He said that His Highness drank too much wine these two days, and…is deficient in health…So, he got sick.”

Huo Wujiu remained motionless. Only his hand, holding the booklet, sharply clenched tight and crumpled the pages of the book.

Drank too much and was health deficient?

Huo Wujiu gripped the book, and an indescribable irritation flooded his heart.

Well done…good on that sickly man.

Braving the rain and drinking outside that day weren’t enough. He must go to his concubine’s room to drink, and must fool around until he suffers from “health deficiency” before stopping.

Huo Wujiu never knew that a person could be so hateful.

Jiang Suizhou was unlike the emperor and Pang Shao, who were rotten to the core but were still people who could not make him lose his calm.

Jiang Suizhou was akin to a cat. He would crawl his way into your heart and sprinkle joy, making you unable to tear your eyes off him, and then he’d do something nasty to provoke you again.

They were petty things that people wouldn’t take to heart, but because Jiang Suizhou was the one who did this kind of thing, it inexplicably triggered

Huo Wujiu's bottom line. It stirred up his emotions all at once, making him jittery and anxious.

Huo Wujiu's fingers fiercely crushed the pages of the book under them.

Meng Qianshan, who was standing next to him, felt uncomfortable. Huo Wujiu's fingers that crushed the book were like a noose around Meng Qianshan's neck, causing him to gasp for air.

At this moment, even as dumb as he was, Meng Qianshan rough had an idea what the "Madam" in front of him was thinking.

Huo Wujiu was inwardly seething, or rather, he was jealous.

"…Madam Huo?" A few moments later, Meng Qianshan strenuously called out in a squeak.

Then he saw his master pause and casually toss aside the book that was crumpled and torn.

He said, "Withdraw."

Meng Qianshan whispered anxiously, "Are you all right? Please be at ease. His Highness is really weak. When he drinks and gets exposed to the wind, it's common for him to…"

Huo Wujiu, who was sitting on his wheelchair, interrupted Meng Qianshan with a cold snort.

The next moment, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes at Meng Qianshan.

"I'm fine," he said. "I just didn't expect that the rules of your King Jing Mansion could be this bad."

Meng Qianshan was puzzled.

Then he saw this master looking out the window with a cold expression. His voice sounded so deep and cold as if it was squeezed out from his teeth.

“This kind of concubine, who pleases and confuses the master, would have been beheaded if in the Marquis of Dingbei Hou House.” Huo Wujiu said slowly.

—

The author has something to say: #MadamHuoisjealous

Footnote:

[4] Dilong extract – literally earthworm powder – a medicinal preparation based on abdominal extracts from the earthworm species used in traditional Chinese medicine for a wide variety of disorders, from convulsions and fevers to rheumatoid arthritis and blood stasis syndromes Want to read more chapters and support us? Please consider becoming a patron to read up to 24 chapters in advance!

Chapter 48

In March, the day was getting warmer and warmer, while the rain lessened.

The dilong in Anyin Hall was carefully stewed for two days, and finally dispersed the moisture inside clean.

However, a prolonged chill pervaded the room ceaselessly.

All the servants in the room said it felt so deserted perhaps because of His Highness’s absence and the absence of one person in the room.

Only Meng Qianshan knew that the reason the room was suffused with coldness was indeed because of the absence of His Highness. However, it wasn’t only because His Highness was missing, but also because he was lodged elsewhere and left a person behind.

Although the daily diet and daily life of the person left behind remained as usual, he was exuding a do-not-come-any-closer air from head to toe against any approaching stranger.

Because of this, Meng Qianshan was walking on eggshells for several days, fearing that this ancestor would vent his anger on anyone who performed poor service.

This lasted until the day Huo Wujiu had to leave the manor.

Today was the day Chen Ti’s wife invited Huo Wujiu to enjoy the flowers. Jiang Suizhou had already returned the first invitation, but it was resent because of an imperial decree issued during the emperor’s birthday banquet some time ago.

Meng Qianshan didn’t dare to forget. Early in the morning, he waited upon Huo Wujiu to wash and change his clothes.

Huo Wujiu naturally refused his service. Meng Qianshan could only leave the robes and accessories together and waited in the side for Huo Wujiu to wear them properly.

When the time came, a carriage left King Jing’s residence and traveled all the way to Chen Ti’s residence.

The wives of colleagues in the court, especially officials in the same ministry, would often host some banquets in the rear courtyards, inviting each other as an expedient way to socialize.

This practice was very common in all dynasties. However, the banquet at Chen Ti’s Residence today was definitely different from the past.

After all, who among the influential officials in the capital didn’t know about King Jing’s penchant for that kind of food? The Jing Dynasty was also particular about the distance between men and women. The ladies were gathering for tea and snacks, so they couldn’t just invite a man to mingle, right?

Ordinary officials wouldn’t do such a thing. Only the wily old fox, Chen Ti, who was used to flattering Pang Shao, knew that if he wanted to please his master, he had to give up his face.

His wife, of course, would advance and retreat with him.

Chen Li stood in front of the house early in the morning, on pins and needles deep inside.

Her husband had already instructed her a few days ago. The purpose of inviting King Jing’s male concubine in their residence as a guest was not to befriend him, but to get him into trouble and have him make a fool out of himself. It was best to cause a stir that would reach His Majesty’s ears.

As a lady from an eminent family, Chen Li was raised in the rear courtyard since she was young. Before she married, she had barely even met a few stranger men. Now that she was suddenly asked to invite a man to the house and also to manipulate said man into making a fool of himself in her house, Chen Li momentarily panicked and didn't know what to do.

After all was said and done, how else could a man make a spectacle of himself in the rear courtyard? The guests who would come to appreciate the flowers were all wives of officials. Damaging anyone's reputation because of it was something Chen Li didn't dare to do.

Consequently, Chen Ti felt exasperated at her failure to meet his expectations. He chastised her in a fit of anger and asked Qin Liu, his concubine, to step forward with her to host the banquet.

This meant entrusting the affairs of King Jing's concubine to Qin Liu.

Chen Li was somewhat relieved and led Qin Liu to wait at the door for the guests' arrival.

When the day dawned, the ladies of each family arrived in their carriages one after another. Qin Liu welcomed each of them, while Chen Li directed her maids to wait in front of the door.

After a long time, a carriage came around the corner and stopped in front of Chen Ti's house.

The carriage's design was unique to the royal family.

Chen Li held her breath, and with a smile on her face, she stepped forward to welcome Huo Wujiu.

The young eunuch sitting outside the carriage jumped down from the carriage, commanded the coachman and the servant to open the curtain, and lifted a wheelchair from the carriage.

There was a tall man sitting in the wheelchair.

Chen Li's gaze only drifted cautiously towards him, with a hasty sweep.

She found that although the man’s eyes were downcast and he exuded an indifferent demeanor, he had a very handsome appearance. His sharp and bold eyebrows, angular face, and the sharp edge-like scar across his eyebrow were as incisive as a sharpened sword, making people too scared to take a closer look.

It was as if the general she had read from a book in her boudoir had come to life.

Chen Li hastily retracted her gaze. She didn’t dare to look any further and only cautiously averted her eyes. “You’re here, Madam Huo. All the ladies have arrived, so please follow me into the house as well, Madam Huo.”

The man in the wheelchair didn’t lift his eyes, let alone respond to her.

Instead, the eunuch following him diligently responded with a smile, “Sorry for bothering you, Mrs. Chen.”

Chen Li nodded, and with her maid’s support, she led the way.

——

The Chen Residence’s garden was not too big. It had a pond inside, but it wasn’t the lotus blooming season yet. The lively garden was set up with flowering trees and bonsai that were common in Lin’an City everywhere.

At this time, a lot of people had gathered in the yard. From a distance, they were dressed in beautiful clothes and hairdos. The crowd of women chattering together pleasantly was even more eye-catching than the flowers and plants.

The ladies in the capital knew each other quite well, so when they arrived, they chatted animatedly.

Just then, a subtle sound of a wheelchair rang out from the courtyard entrance.

For a moment, the crowd stopped, and a brief silence fell over the garden.

Several gazes fell on Huo Wujiu, and then moved away instantly as if they hadn't seen him.

The ladies in the courtyard also had a score in their hearts.

Lord Chen was trying to secure a personal gain. In order to please His Majesty at his birthday banquet, he asked His Majesty to bestow a decree to get the man in the rear courtyard of King Jing's residence to attend the flower viewing. The man who arrived wasn't just any man, but a captive from Northern Liang; the same man who fought on battlefields and killed people like one killed flies.

Men and women were seated separately at banquets, so none of the ladies had ever seen Huo Wujiu. But just from his reputation they heard in previous years, he probably resembled Qin Shubao[1], the door-god they stuck on doors.

But never did they imagine…

Some of the close noble ladies exchanged looks with each order while maintaining their composure.

General Huo…How could he be so handsome?

Footnote:

[1] Qin Shubao – a general from China's Tang Dynasty that was later deified in Chinese mythology. As legend goes, the emperor asked them to stand guard over his sleep to ward off a ghost that had been troubling him in the night.

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Chapter 49

Nevertheless, nobody in the crowd around dared to stare a second longer. Lord Chen most likely didn't have any good intentions when he requested this man's presence here. They must hide far away and not get involved, lest they'd be contaminated with filth.

With this in mind, everybody averted their eyes and treated Huo Wujiu like air.

Unexpectedly, a young lady tugged on the sleeve of her close friend and whispered, "The heavens is really jealous of a heroic genius[2] like him. It's God's will to torture him like this…"

Her close friend promptly grabbed her and stopped her from talking nonsense.

On the other side, Qin Liu saw that everyone invited had arrived, so she asked all the ladies to take their seats in the garden.

She had been in Chen Ti's rear courtyard for almost three years. Although she got into this mess because of the main wife's cowardice, she still had to find a chance to make an entrance. Today's event was the opportunity that Lord Chen provided Qin Liu, so wasn't this her lucky chance? She had to win everybody's favor at today's banquet and carry out what Lord Chen wanted her to do well, so that everyone could see who the wise helper of her husband was.

Chen Li was faint-hearted and wasn't as clever as her. Shortly after, Qin Liu shuttled between the ladies, ushering them in various positions and asking them to sit down. She then asked the maids to step forward to serve tea and snacks.

After all these were arranged, Qin Liu walked enchantingly in front of Huo Wujiu.

“Good day, Madam Huo.” She smiled and bowed to Huo Wujiu.

As early as just now, Qin Liu had secretly sized up the man in the wheelchair. He had an outstanding appearance, a noble temperament, and was heard to be a deadly warrior. Unfortunately, he was now just a prisoner of war subjected to indignities, and a cripple.

Since she wanted to use today’s opportunity to rise in status, then she had no choice but to offend him, and also trample on him.

With this in mind, Qin Liu smilingly remarked, neither light nor heavy but genuinely meant to offend, “I had only heard that you, Madam Huo, are a man of striking appearance. I’ve never expected that seeing you in person once is a hundred times better than hearing it from the mouth of others. Today, you’ve visited our residence. Although we are also considered sisters, there are still differences between men and women regardless. So, I arranged a distant seat for you. Please don’t take offense.”

Of course, Huo Wujiu ignored her.

Meng Qianshan behind him smiled and said, “Thank you, Concubine.”

Qin Liu covered her lips and smiled, saying that it was no big deal. She guided them to a table by the pond and asked Huo Wujiu to take a seat there.

Just then, the maid in charge of pouring tea greeted them.

Qin Liu’s mind turned a hundred times and already came up with a trick. She naturally reached out and took the teapot from the maid’s hand, then smiled and walked over to Huo Wujiu’s side and quite naturally poured him tea.

She didn’t see, however, that Huo Wujiu, who had his eyes downcast, frowned indistinctly.

The next moment, Qin Liu deftly exclaimed and knocked over the tea. The ladies were attracted by this alarming cry and saw that Qin Liu seemed to be embraced by someone. She looked as if she'd been molested and fell straight towards Huo Wujiu.

Everyone turned pale.

But Huo Wujiu, who was sitting there, frowned tightly. His hand pressed his wheelchair to the side and turned, cleverly avoiding her.

Hence, Qin Liu's initial attempt to pose as a victim of the man's forced embrace instead turned into deliberate leaning toward him, and was unreservedly exposed to the crowd.

Immediately after, she leaned into empty air. In her failure to stand firm, she plunged straight down, head first into the pond.

——

Shrieks ensued from the crowd of women.

The maids jumped into the pond to save Qin Liu, and chaos reigned everywhere. Only Huo Wujiu silently pressed his wheelchair and moved a few steps forward to give the pond an icy glare.

That trifling trick was so obvious. He sensed that something was wrong as early as when she leaned towards him.

Meng Qianshan beside him was scared silly.

Qin Liu was rescued in no time and wrapped up tightly in a robe and blanket. Chen Li rushed forward to have her sent down to rest. However, Qin Liu, who was rescued, struggled and was unwilling to let go.

Qin Liu knew that since she started it, she must carry it out to the end. She had just failed her trick and paid the price, so now, she absolutely couldn't neglect any bit of advantage.

The eyes of the crowd fell on her.

She cried, “How could Madam Huo do such a thing? Not only did he despise me, but he also pushed me down the pond!”

Everyone around was well aware that she was framing Huo Wujiu. However, they kept their thoughts to themselves, and no one dared to stand up and expose her.

Qin Liu knew that this method had worked, so she performed more and more vigorously.

“I have lost my chastity. My Lord, I have no dignity to see you anymore! You guys let go of me. Let me knock my head to death here, then I’ll be clean!”

Chen Li stood by with trepidation.

She knew exactly what Qin Liu was thinking. If she made a scene like this today, word would immediately get out, and tomorrow, her husband could use this as an excuse to face His Majesty.

She wanted to stop it, but as a married woman, she had to obey her husband’s orders.

She cautiously glanced at Huo Wujiu.

He was sitting upright, expressionless and cold, quietly watching the farce Qin Liu was performing.

Like a steel gun that no one could bend.

Chen Li had never seen a military officer fighting in a war, but at this time, she somehow felt that an indomitable general should resemble him.

It was a pity that the Heavens were jealous of him and left him chin-deep in danger. Under such circumstances, no one naturally could help him…

But at this stage, a concierge came running anxiously.

“Madam…Madam!” The concierge shouted.

Chen Li looked behind her and saw the concierge stopping at the garden door, looking frightened and discomfited.

“What’s wrong?” Chen Li asked.

The concierge immediately replied, “King Jing is in the mansion hall!”

—

The author has something to say:

Jiang Suizhou: I think I am very handsome, I fell from the sky, a hero to save the beauty. At this time, I need a little BGM.

Huo Wujiu: How dare you come? [grieved]

Footnote:

2 The heaven is jealous of heroic genius – those whom God love die young

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Chapter 50

For a moment, silence reigned in all four corners, and only the sound of Qin Liu's wailing and sobbing was left, which was also stifled by her trepidation.

Chen Li froze for a moment before she greeted him with a forced smile. She said, "His Highness Jingwang is here? His Highness has not notified us in advance. Our residence is full of ladies at the moment, and I have not prepared, not prepared…"

The servant quickly interrupted, "His Highness Jingwang s-said…"

"No need to prepare."

Right at that moment, a clear and chilly voice came from behind him.

Everyone hurriedly looked in his direction.

He saw a noble young childe, walking slowly to the garden with the support of a manservant.

It was clearly a spring day when all sorts of flowers were blooming, but he was wrapped in a snow-white cloak with a circle of white fur at the collar.The man had wide fluttering sleeves and a jade crown. When he approached slowly, he looked like a god descending from the clouds, with a noble and inviolable bearing.

But looking at his overly exquisite face, everyone felt that there was a bit of charm in his arrogance, resembling the essence of a white fox.

The crowd froze for a moment before they hurriedly got up and bowed to greet him.

The man was none other than Jiang Suizhou.

Seeing the garden filled with a bevy of women bowing to him, Jiang Suizhou raised his hand, signaling them to rise.

He scanned the garden without a trace, and then paused on Qin Liu.

Sure enough. He thought to himself.

He knew that Chen Ti had gone to great lengths to get Huo Wujiu to come to his manor and would not do nothing. However, he didn't expect that Chen Ti would be so open-minded as to make such a move that would cost him his wife and his troops just for the sake of tormenting Huo Wujiu.

He quietly glanced at Huo Wujiu.

As he expected, this person still looked aloof from the matter, and did not even glance at Jiang Suizhou when he arrived.

But fortunately, seeing that the crying woman was quite far from Huo Wujiu, she must have tried to frame him but failed. The situation was not too bad.

Jiang Suizhou took a rough stock of the current situation deep inside. He slowly walked up to Chen Li, stopping at a position three steps away from her.

"I've come without informing you. I'm sorry for disturbing you, Madam Chen," he said slowly.

Chen Li hurriedly bowed to him and forced a smile: "What is the Prince saying? Your gracious presence here is a great honor to our humble abode…"

Jiang Suizhou looked around at the garden of Chen's residence.

His own house was indeed quite simple and ordinary. It could not be compared with those magnificent love nest manors Chen Ti bought with the money he embezzled.

“Humble abode…” Jiang Suizhou pointed out with a smile that expressed volumes surfacing on his face.

Chen Li inexplicably felt deeply flustered.

Then she heard Jiang Suizhou shifting the topic, saying with a gentle smile, “It’s going too far to say my presence brings light to your humble dwelling. My visit today is merely because I don’t trust the man in your residence. I came to check if he’s caused trouble again.”

After saying that, his eyes leisurely roamed around the garden and finally landed on Qin Liu.

“Now it seems that I have come at a good time, eh?”

His tone was gentle and sounded quite kind. But for some reason, the hearts of everyone in the courtyard jumped to their throats, and they dared not make the tiniest sound.

Qin Liu, who was shivering in her robe, cautiously raised her eyes and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

Then she saw His Highness Jingwang, whose beauty transcended mortals, gave Huo Wujiu a cold look and walked straight forward. The young eunuch behind Huo Wujiu seemingly understood what he meant in an instant. He trotted forward and brought him a wooden armchair.

His Highness sat unhurriedly on the armchair with his cloak fluttering, graceful and noble.

Qin Liu saw that when His Highness was seated on the chair, his eyes fell on her.

His cold and haughty eyes bore semblance to standing atop the clouds, looking disdainfully at the mortals in the dust below. Nonetheless, his eyes radiated an inexplicable charm, as if to suck people in. It was akin to a moth flying into the flame, crashing into him.

For a spell, Qin Liu stared at him and felt her breathing stop.

But at that moment, His Highness Jingwang spoke. “Tell me about it,” he said, “What happened?”

It was only then that Qin Liu woke up as if in a dream and hastily looked at the people around her. But to her surprise, she only stared blankly at His Highness Jingwang for a few breaths, and that Madam Huo, who hadn’t spared her a single glance since he entered the garden, was actually looking at her.

His eyes were ice-cold, and his brow was furrowed. He was looking down at her, as if looking at something dirty.

Qin Liu took a deep breath and tried to calm herself down.

Since His Highness Jingwang was here, the development of the situation would definitely change. As for whether the situation would become more serious or quashed depended on Jingwang’s attitude.

Now it seemed that Jingwang detested Huo Wujiu, so she only needed to add more fuel to the fire to make things worse.

She gulped and boldly shook off the maids on either side of her, and greeted Jiang Suizhou, kneeling in front of him.

“Your Highness Jingwang.” Her eyes welled up with tears, and she choked up as she spoke, “The matter involves this lady servant’s reputation. Although it happened in public, this servant feels disgraced to speak of it!”

After saying that, she couldn’t help herself anymore. She lifted her sleeve to wipe her tears. While wiping her tears, she choked with sobs, “Why don’t you just let this servant die? At least, I’ll die innocent!”

She knew that men succumbed to this the most.

As long as she showed weakness and became the victim, people would become softhearted. A man’s heart has always been biased. Once it melted, the man would become increasingly partial. At this juncture, he would believe whatever she said, wouldn’t he?

While Qin Liu wiped the tears of her effort, Qin Liu didn’t forget to peek at Jiang Suizhou.

But she saw His Highness Jingwang acting as if he hadn’t seen her tears at all. He stretched out a slender, white hand from his cloak, picked the cup of hot tea handed by the eunuch next to him, and drank it slowly.

“Forget it if you don’t want to say it.” he said indifferently.

Qin Liu froze.

Then His Highness put the tea aside, raised his hand and pointed randomly in the crowd. Next, he named a lady and said unhurriedly, “My lady, please come and give this Prince an account.”

Qin Liu was completely dumbfounded.

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Chapter 51

She had forgotten that the man in front of her was a man who did not like women. Her drama was clearly performed for the blind.

Qin Liu hurriedly turned her head back and saw that Jiang Suizhou was pointing at the wife that the heir of the Duke of An Guo had just married.

She had interacted with the woman just now, and from the few words she exchanged with her, she figured that she was a young pampered lady of a rich family. Her husband's family also spoiled her, and she had never suffered any hardship all her life. Her mind was as simple as a blank sheet of paper.

Sure enough, hearing that Jingwang named her, the noble heir's wife was dumbstruck. For a moment, she looked between Jingwang and Qin Liu, standing there at a loss.

"Just now…" she opened her mouth cautiously, not knowing what to say.

Then Jingwang gently smiled at her. "Madam, just tell the truth," he coaxed.

The lady hesitated for a moment, but still whispered, "It's nothing. It's just that Concubine Qin didn't stand firm and leaned towards Madam Huo. But Madam Huo dodged, and she fell headfirst into the lake…"

"Is that so?" Jingwang then asked.

The surrounding ladies exchanged glances, but none of them refuted.

Qin Liu's heart dropped to the soles of her feet.

She watched as Jingwang smiled lightly and nodded at the lady, and then looked at her.

There was a trace of satisfied smile in his seductive fox-like eyes.

It was only then that Qin Liu came back to her senses.

It seems that Jingwang, who rushed here with overweening arrogance to denounce Huo Wujiu publicly, was simply a false shot.

He came today to clean her up for Huo Wujiu.

But everything was so logical that she had a hard time saying anything.

—

On the carriage back to the manor, the only sound was the rolling of the wheels.

Jiang Suizhou leaned on the wall of the carriage, his breath still a bit uneven.

In fact, he could not get out of bed until today. Chen's residence was not too big, but he didn't even have a palanquin. He had walked all the way to the garden and already couldn't bear it.

Fortunately, everything was dealt with flawlessly.

He didn't give the woman who did the harm a chance to speak, but pointed to a girl he'd had his eye on for a while. The girl looked young. She was dressed in a gorgeous dress, and her emotions were all written on her face. At first glance, she was a naive lady with a powerful backer, who could not lie.

Sure enough, by exposing the concubine's lies, she had also let the main wife dispose of her rightfully on the spot.

Although not to the point of killing her, the woman ruined her reputation herself.

Because of this farce, he was also able to take Huo Wujiu away in advance. He didn't have to stay there and choke on the rouge powder smell.

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou was in a good mood and asked, "Are you alright?"

His relationship with Huo Wujiu now was not so stiff. Naturally, he talked a lot with him. As long as he started a conversation, Huo Wujiu would definitely respond to him…

But silence answered him.

The carriage quieted down again after Jiang Suizhou finished asking. Huo Wujiu next to him seemed to have not heard him, and didn't say a word.

Hmm?

Jiang Suizhou looked at him in confusion.

What's the matter?

Huo Wujiu, who was sitting there, turned his head and met his gaze coldly.

"Are you feeling better?"

Instead of answering his question, he asked a rhetorical question, abruptly and at once, confusing Jiang Suizhou.

"What?" Jiang Suizhou was nonplussed.

Huo Wujiu suddenly raised his hand, directly covered his forehead, rough and direct, and messed up the hair in front of his forehead.

Jiang Suizhou reflexively dodged to the side, but the space in the carriage was narrow and he was not as strong as Huo Wujiu. Hence, before he could resist, Huo Wujiu pinned Jiang Suizhou down and freely let his rough hand press against his forehead.

A few moments later, he retracted his hand.

“What are you doing?” Jiang Suizhou got up from the carriage, breathing unevenly.

Huo Wujiu, who had withdrawn his hand and also withdrawn his gaze along with it, looked ahead. He had a cold expression, looking neither right nor left.

“You’re much better,” he muttered.

Jiang Suizhou felt a little amused for a moment and retorted, “I don’t have a fever. What’s the use of touching my forehead?”

Huo Wujiu gave him a sideway glance.

Jiang Suizhou was weak because of the drug. At this time, he was solely preoccupied with holding onto the carriage to sit straight. He didn’t know that his pale appearance, unstable breathing, and disheveled hair were all captured by Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu paused, opened his mouth, and gruffly spoke. “Now that you can move, come stay in your own courtyard,” he said coldly.

“What?” Jiang Suizhou was taken aback.

Although Huo Wujiu was not the same as an ordinary concubine, he was, at best, a prisoner of war detained in Jiang Suizhou’s house. But …How could Huo Wujiu sound so justified in arranging where he could stay?

Huo Wujiu said in a low voice, “If you die of consumption in your concubine’s room, I’ll be sent back to the imperial prison.”

After speaking, he turned around and did not look at Jiang Suizhou again.

Jiang Suizhou froze and returned to his senses.

Whoa! This man actually dared to openly curse him to death!

As expected, Huo Wujiu didn’t often speak, but once he opened his mouth, he would most likely anger people to death.

Jiang Suizhou glared at him with hatred and sat upright in the carriage.

I’m not going to die! As long as you don’t chop my head off, I’ll live a long life!

With this thought in mind, he turned his head to look out the window and ignored Huo Wujiu.

He failed to see that the hands Huo Wujiu placed on his lap were tightly clenched into fists.

It was a man, hastily fending off his raging jealousy.

Even Huo Wujiu himself could not have imagined that just one glance, just one glance at Jiang Suizhou’s messy and frail appearance was enough to upset him. His eyes burned. He was even irritable to the point of wanting to shoot through the chest of the person who had shared this look with Jiang Suizhou.

In the silence, an evil dragon seemed to be awakening in his chest.

The evil dragon was greedy and irascible, and his eyes were fixed unwaveringly on a certain treasure.

—

The author has something to say:

Gu Changyun: You may not believe me, but if it weren’t for luck, I would have died 800 times over.

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Chapter 52

Although Jiang Suizhou felt that Huo Wujiu was rather baffling, he still returned to Anyin Hall that day.

He initially was reluctant to stay at Gu Changyun's place for a long time, and had been staying there purely because he was bedridden. Now that he finally got better, he naturally wanted to return to his own place.

——He had to face Huo Wujiu's scowls, though.

He also had no idea where he had provoked Huo Wujiu. However, knowing that this man was as capricious as the weather, with an utterly unpredictable temper, he didn't pay him any mind.

When he returned to Anyin Hall, he and Huo Wujiu remained in their own space as in the old days, and no one provoked anyone.

He also quietly waited for his arrangement with his two staff to take effect.

True enough, from the time Jiang Suizhou fell ill, the palace sent imperial doctors. Nonetheless, the imperial doctors only said that his illness was due to weakness and palpitation, and they couldn't cure it. Hence, even after taking bitter medicine for several days, he never got better.

Treatments did not work, and gradually, the news that the imperial doctors brought back to the palace became stale.

They told the Hou Zhu that His Highness Jingwang's health was deteriorating, and now he could only rest in bed. Perhaps because the illness struck too swiftly and damaged His Highness Jingwang's foundation, his already fragile constitution became even worse.

This was something worth celebrating for the Hou Zhu, more than the New Year.

Of course, sharing the joy with others was better than enjoying it alone. After knowing this, the Emperor immediately told the imperial doctor that there was no longer a need to treat him. However, he must go to Jingwang's Manor again and inadvertently reveal the matter to His Highness Jingwang. Tell him that his frail self might be running out of time.

The Imperial Doctor naturally did as he was told.

So, early this morning, when the Imperial Doctor from the palace checked Jiang Suizhou's pulse, he showed a look of swallowing the words on the tip of his tongue back.

"What's wrong?" Jiang Suizhou saw his feigned serious expression at a glance, leaned on the headboard, and coldly asked.

The Imperial Doctor sighed and hesitated for a while. Afterward, Then he sighed again and knelt down in front of Jiang Suizhou.

"Although this servant is reluctant to speak bluntly…" he sighed, "Your Highness better stop taking this medicine."

Jiang Suizhou knew it very well.

As expected, this serious doctor still couldn't deal with Gu Changyun's unorthodox methods. The doctor must have found that he couldn't cure him and ran to tell the Hou Zhu. He then got orders from the latter to stop giving him medical treatment in the future.

Then, their own recruitment notices for doctors could also be posted out.

Even the dead soldiers Xu Du kept on his behalf could act as servants. They could dispatch several of them to seek medical advice in remote places.

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou was deeply at ease, but he still maintained an impatient expression. He frowned and asked, "Why should I stop it?"

The Imperial Doctor cautiously glanced at him.

“The truth is…” he stammered, not knowing how to say it.

Jiang Suizhou scowled: “This Prince dislikes hearing nonsense.”

The Imperial Doctor criticized inwardly: *I know you don’t like to listen to nonsense, but I’m afraid you won’t be able to accept this concise truth.*

He made up his mind and said cautiously, “The truth is, Your Highness is seriously ill. Your roots and bones are already damaged, so it’s difficult to cure you.”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

What? Was Gu Changyun’s medicine so good that it had fooled a wily old fox of the Imperial Hospital?

He was only focused on the doctor and didn’t notice that when Huo Wujiu, who was nearby, heard this, his head snapped up. Huo Wujiu frowned and looked in Jiang Suizhou’s direction.

He listened as the Imperial Doctor stammeringly continued, “Your Highness also…also doesn’t need medical treatment. If you have any tonic, bird’s nest and ginseng, you can just take them, by all means. Maybe you can…can…”

“Can what?” Jiang Suizhou frowned.

The Imperial Doctor gulped his saliva and relayed the words the Hou Zhu had told him.

“Your days are numbered.”

Right after his words fell, the room fell into a deathly silence.

The Imperial Doctor kowtowed on the floor and did not dare to move.

After a long time, he heard Jiang Suizhou’s slightly tremulous voice.

“Get lost,” he ordered.

The Imperial Doctor froze and looked up at him dumbly.

Then he saw Jiang Suizhou on the bed with a frosty face, towering over him and squeezing out a couple of words between clenched teeth.

“Get out.”

As if given a second life, the Imperial Doctor rolled and crawled as he fled.

Soon, the only two people left in the room were Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu’s brows were wrinkled and rigidly tight.

…What did that Imperial Doctor just say?

He stared closely at Jiang Suizhou.

He saw Jiang Suizhou, sitting on the bed, raising his hand and rubbing his temples. It was as if he was trying to suppress some emotion. The corners of his mouth were twitching and almost trembling.

Just because he stayed at Gu Changyun’s place for a few days, he…

The hand that Huo Wujiu placed on his knee clenched tightly, and the veins on the back of his hand throbbed.

He no longer cared to grumble and ridicule Jiang Suizhou for abandoning himself to sensual pleasures.

Now he not only wanted to kill Gu Changyun, but also hated his own disability and uselessness. He could no longer turn the world upside down and find a doctor who could cure Jiang Suizhou for him.

He stared fixed at his hand.

He suddenly had an urge to initiate contact with Ji Hongcheng, risk finding Lou Yue in advance, blackmail him for his life-saving grace, and kill his bloody way out in advance.

—

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Chapter 53

At the door, Meng Qianshan hurriedly ran in and plopped on his knees in front of Jiang Suizhou’s bed.

Jiang Suizhou was startled.

It was really no wonder he was distracted. It was just that the Imperial Doctor’s performance surprised him too much. He and Gu Changyun originally only wanted to fool him for a while, but never thought it would have such a remarkable effect.

It even made people think that his days were numbered?

Jiang Suizhou wanted to laugh.

He saw Meng Qianshan kneeling in front of him with tears in his eyes. Just as he opened his mouth, he burst into tears.

“Master!” Sorrow enveloped him.

He made Jiang Suizhou tremble in fright. For a spell, he felt that he was no longer a living person, but a piece of memorial tablet placed on the bed.

“Control yourself.” He frowned.

Meng Qianshan wiped his tears in a flurry. However, the more he wiped, the more tears fell, like a bottomless river.

“Master, surely we can find a doctor who can cure you!” he cried, “If anything untoward happens to you, I won’t live, and I’ll serve you underneath…”

“All right, all right.”

His weeping gave Jiang Suizhou a headache.

“Okay, in a moment, you will go out and look for people to put up notices for me. Afterward, send some troops to the surrounding counties to find a doctor,” he instructed, “Anybody with excellent medical expertise, whether they’re famous or practice unorthodox methods, must be brought back. Understood?”

Meng Qianshan nodded repeatedly.

Jiang Suizhou casually yanked a silk handkerchief and lightly flung it on his face.

“If you understand, go and do it. Don’t mourn in front of this Prince,” he said.

Meng Qianshan whimpered and nodded again. He wiped his tears and ran out to do his job.

Jiang Suizhou watched his back with some amusement.

Although his own ‘dying’ was fake, Meng Qianshan’s reaction…still moved him.

He withdrew his gaze and happened to meet Huo Wujiu’s eyes out of the corner of his eyes.

Jiang Suizhou froze and turned his head to look at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu frowned and looked straight at him sullenly.

With no one else in the room, Jiang Suizhou uttered a snorting laugh heedlessly and curled his lips in a smile: “Did you also think I am about to die?”

Huo Wujiu frowned and looked him up and down.

A few moments later, he said slowly, “Don’t take it to heart. The doctors in the capital have encountered very few difficult cases, so don’t dwell on their diagnosis.”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned, and then he seemed to realize that Huo Wujiu had thought he was a little out of sorts from anger.

He froze and was about to speak, when he saw Huo Wujiu approach him with his wheelchair pressed. He said indifferently, “You’ll eventually be cured.”

Jiang Suizhou was momentarily stunned.

Whether it was his illusion or not, he heard a clear affirmation from Huo Wujiu’s mouth, as if he was promising him something.

At present, he was obviously just a captive…

Jiang Suizhou did not know how Huo Wujiu had already contrived plans in this very short period.

He had shifted all the early and step-by-step plans he had in mind forward, and changed a safe and smooth road into a thorny shortcut.

And all this was to break free from his cage in advance, to step into the blood mud of all those enemies who bullied and humiliated him, and guide his sword toward the Jing Dynasty. While at it…while at it, he would search all over the world and find someone who could save this dim-witted and invalid Jingwang.

…*It was just in passing.*

Jiang Suizhou was totally in the dark about this, but he somehow felt the firmness in his tone.

He was momentarily stunned, then spoke steadily, saying words that made him feel a little out of bounds himself.

“Of course, I’ll be fine,” he echoed.

“…I can heal you too, do you believe it?”

—

After that day, Jiang Suizhou recuperated in his residence with peace of mind.

He looked too content, and within two days, Huo Wujiu noticed the signs. He didn’t resemble a terminally ill patient, but rather like a hunter who was waiting for his prey to fall into the trap.

And why exactly was he doing this?

Huo Wujiu would always remember the words he said to him that day.

Jiang Suizhou said he would heal him, and he asked him whether he believed it or not.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t possibly not grasp what he meant. But, for the first time, he, who had always been bold, did not dare to delve deeper.

How could someone harm himself in order to seek medical treatment for him?

The notion was like a little animal that broke loose and rampaged its way to his heart. He was so flustered that he hurriedly shut the little thing back to its cage and randomly found a corner to tuck it in.

This was the very first time in his life that he had done such a cowardly deed.

Jingwang Manor was sedate and peaceful, but in the Ministry of Rites, there was turmoil and chaos of war in recent days with everyone feeling imperilled.

The Ministry of Justice thoroughly investigated Ji You, but only found that he embezzled and could not find the whereabouts of the money. So, in accordance with the court’s practice, officials of the Ministry of Justice

dropped in and questioned all the officials up and down the Ministry of Rites who had contact with the matters of the Emperor’s birthday banquet.

Few people, who held office at court, were spotless. Moreover, His Majesty was in charge of investigating the case, so no one dared to neglect it.

Those innocent bystanders also had some calculations. They must hide under such thorough scrutiny for fear of being caught in the crossfire.

Jingwang Manor wasn’t spared either.

After scouting all the way down, an official finally went up to the door of the Jingwang Manor.

Everyone in the court knew that Jingwang was unwell these days and had been recuperating in his house. There were also rumors abounding that His Highness Jingwang was seriously sick this time and might be to the point of death.

Naturally, the official did not dare to touch Jingwang’s bad luck. When he arrived at the residence, he conducted a routine inquiry, and then left.

After all, His Highness Jingwang was not short of money, so why would he be greedy for more? Even if he embezzled this four or five thousand taels, His Majesty would never blame him for the sake of brotherly love.

The official just wanted to go through the motions.

Unexpectedly, as soon as he left King Jing’s Anyin Hall and passed by the garden of the manor, he heard a restrained voice from an elevated lane. The voice with a trace of exasperation reached his ears.

“Can you blame me for this? Isn’t it because the Prince has bought a house outside and raised a younger one? I don’t even know where the Prince got the money to build a ‘golden house’ for that little fox!”

The official from the Ministry of Justice paused and looked in that direction.

In the corner of the garden, a beautiful gentleman in red was standing in the corner with arms akimbo, ranting in a whisper to the maid at his side.

___

The author has something to say:

Jiang Suizhou: Speaking of this good wife, we have to look at our Chang Kyun…

Huo Wujiu rocked his wheelchair and moved out gloomily.

Jiang Suizhou: Why are you leaving?

Huo Wujiu: To kill the dog Emperor and be your good wife.

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Chapter 54

Surrounded by lush flowers and trees and sheltered by the courtyard wall, the two people talking in the corner didn’t notice the Ministry of Justice official not far away.

The man in red finished his speech and turned around toward Anyin Hall. Seeing that he was heading straight in his direction, the Ministry of Justice official immediately sought the cover of a nearby tree and hid his figure.

The next moment, the maid hastily pulled the red-robed gentleman back.

“Master, you can’t go!” She hurriedly said. “The Prince is sick. If you go now, what are we going to do if the Prince’s health worsens from irritation?!”

The red-robed gentleman laughed furiously.

“Piss him off? I don’t think so. Since he has the energy to fool around with vixens outside, I think he’s in good health,” he countered.

The maid said, “Why do you say that, Master? Besides, the courtyard where that gentleman outside lives might not have been bought by the Prince.”

The red-clad gentleman laughed grimly.

“The Prince redeemed him, so where can he get the money to buy a house? Moreover, the mansion in the center of Changle Square faces the south. Without a few thousand taels of silver, can he afford it?”

The maid was rendered speechless.

The red-robed gentleman seemed to be getting more and more angry as he spoke, and his voice rose a few decibels.

“The manor’s money has always been under my control. Say, there is no turnover in the house, so where did the Prince get so much silver to buy a mansion for that little vixen? Today, I must go to the Prince and ask about it. Otherwise, I might as well tell him to sell me quickly. It is better than suffering from this kind of confusion here…”

The maid hastened to stop him. They played tug of war and went straight into Anyin Hall.

A long time later, the Ministry of Justice official slowly came out of the dark.

He was so shocked that his hands shook.

He absolutely did not expect that a routine investigation, which was just a formality, would let him run into such a big secret.

So was the silver embezzled by His Highness Jingwang? He broke the law and embezzled His Majesty’s birthday banquet funds because the concubine in his residence was violent. He embezzled the money to keep a mistress outside?

The official was not qualified to make decisions. In his shock, he just knew that he had to rush back to the palace without delay and inform His Majesty of this major discovery.

—

Inside Anyin Hall, there was a pleasant radiance of spring.

When Meng Qianshan saw Gu Changyun leading a maid straight into the courtyard, he was startled as he hurriedly welcomed him. Meng Qianshan wanted to stop Gu Changyun but didn’t dare to.

Although Madam Gu was usually domineering, Meng Qianshan had never seen him visit His Highness’ courtyard to meet him before.

Seeing how dumbfounded he was, Gu Changyun raised his eyebrows and smiled at him: “What? Meng Qianshan, are you so happy to see this Madam that you can no longer speak?”

Meng Qianshan forced a smile on his face and greeted him.

“Madam Gu, has something good happened today? Unfortunately, His Highness has just gone to rest. If you need anything, it’ll be better for this servant to let His Highness know on your behalf…”

He kept apace with Gu Changyun, putting in a good word while attempting to stop him.

Gu Changyun frowned. He glanced at Meng Qianshan and pushed him away, then went straight to Jiang Suizhou’s main room.

“Still trying to deceive me? Do you think I didn’t see that someone just happened to come out from here?”

As he spoke, he walked up the stone steps and pushed the door to Jiang Suizhou’s room.

Hearing the creak of the door, Jiang Suizhou glanced sideways in that direction. He saw a bright red figure making a beeline to his room.

Jiang Suizhou heaved a sigh of relief.

He knew that Gu Changyun had come to report to him after the deed was done.

Gu Changyun met his gaze, and while walking in, he cast an amorous wink at him.

Jiang Suizhou felt so sour his teeth almost fell out.

He glanced at Gu Changyun and was about to withdraw his gaze when he saw the man smile and greet him at the side of his bed.

“This concubine came here unannounced. Your Highness won’t blame me, will you?” he smiled.

Jiang Suizhou looked at him indifferently and let him continue his act.

After bowing, Gu Changyun stood up and sat at the edge of his bed.

“Your Highness, please don’t blame me. It’s really because I haven’t seen Your Highness for several days and was worried, so I took the liberty to come and visit you,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou said indifferently, “Is it done?”

Gu Changyun knew what he was asking about.

He smiled and bumped his shoulder against him: “Your Highness, do you still not trust me?”

After speaking, he swept his gaze across the bedroom, paused on Huo Wujiu who was in the corner, and retracted his subsequent words.

After all, there was someone else in the room. If he wanted to say more, he had to exercise restraint to some extent.

Following Gu Changyun’s gaze, Jiang Suizhou also saw Huo Wujiu, who was sitting there without saying a word.

This was usually how they coexisted in the room during the day. His bedroom was extremely spacious, and each of them were on either side of the room, not disturbing the other.

But at the moment, Jiang Suizhou felt that Huo Wujiu’s body looked somewhat misshapen.

Where exactly was he misshapen…he couldn’t put his finger on.

Gu Changyun, who was sitting beside his bed, turned around and reverted to his innate habit of teasing again.

He laughed: “Yo, this concubine’s eyes are blind. How didn’t I notice that Madam Huo is also here?”

Jiang Suizhou watched as Gu Changyun stood up from his bedside and went towards Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu lifted his head and looked at Gu Changyun.

Huo Wujiu’s gaze was heavy, and the cold emotions in it were hidden deep in the swirls of his eyes.

Gu Changyun was oblivious to it and stood still in front of him.

“It must be exhausting for you, Younger Brother, to serve the Prince everyday,” he said smilingly.

Huo Wujiu didn’t say a word.

But in the next moment, Gu Changyun extended his hand.

Then he grasped the book in Huo Wujiu’s hand.

“Ah, what book is Madam Huo reading?” Gu Changyun smilingly asked while trying to pull that book out of Huo Wujiu’s hand.

Once, twice.

The book didn’t budge at all.

Gu Changyun blinked and looked at Huo Wujiu.

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Chapter 55

The man in the wheelchair slowly raised his eyes, a pair of pitch-dark eyes calmly fell on his face.

The smile on Gu Changyun's face involuntarily froze, and his hand gently let go of the book. After retracting his hand, he subconsciously placed his hands behind his back.

For a moment, Gu Changyun had an inexplicable suspicion.

He felt that if Jiang Suizhou was not watching from behind them, the man in front of him would have snapped his neck.

He embodied a ferocious beast ready to strike, and the only thing that confined him was Jiang Suizhou's eyes behind him.

For the first time, Gu Changyun acutely realized that he had played with and touched someone he shouldn't have.

He stood frozen in place for a moment, motionless.

Just then, Jiang Suizhou's cold voice rang.

"This Prince is fine. If there's nothing else, go back," he said indifferently.

Only then did Gu Changyun gradually regain his strength. He felt a layer of cold sweat on his back.

He was about to take a step back when he heard a soft snap.

He looked up and saw that the book was tossed lightly on the side table. The person sitting in front of him lowered his eyes, pressed the wheelchair

with one hand, turned a bit, and headed straight out.

It was only when the sound of the wheelchair faded away that Gu Changyun managed to withdraw his gaze.

Then he saw Jiang Suizhou, who was sitting on the bed, looking at him disapprovingly.

“Do you have nothing better to do than to provoke him?” Jiang Suizhou lowered his voice and asked.

Gu Changyun returned to the bed and sat down, his expression a bit pensive.

Jiang Suizhou was far away and did not see the lightning bolt eye-contact held between them just now. But Gu Changyun sat down slowly beside his bed, his eyes a little empty.

Jiang Suizhou raised his finger and pointed at him.

“I won’t be responsible for saving you if you provoke him.” Jiang Suizhou gnashed his teeth.

But Gu Changyun shook his head.

“I feel that Huo Wujiu wasn’t angered by this servant.” Gu Changyun muttered.

Jiang Suizhou frowned: “What?”

Gu Changyun raised his eyes and looked straight at him.

“It’s not like that,” he said, “Madam Huo is not so small-minded. I usually provoke him a few times, but as long as I don’t touch him, he treats me as if I’m non-existent.”

Jiang Suizhou glanced at him.

Gu Changyun looked back at him and suddenly chuckled a couple of times.

“Today, however, he’s…” he paused.

“He’s like jealous of me.”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

The next moment, he raised his hand without mercy and landed a smack on Gu Changyun’s head.

“You’re crazy,” he said.

—

That day after, some doctors gradually visited Jiang Suizhou’s residence one after another.

Whatever skills the doctors had, Jiang Suizhou needn’t investigate; everything was handed over to Gu Changyun. Gu Changyun drove some of those who were not talented and were looking for fame and fortune out of the house early on, and he also contrived some excuses to send the ones who were inept at treating disabilities and injuries out.

For a few days, Jiang Suizhou met several people one after another. After testing them, they didn’t have any dependable skills.

He also knew that the doctors around Lin’an who had some actual skill all ran to the Imperial Hospital. To find an excellent doctor, he needed to wait a little longer and see the results of the people he dispatched to the field to investigate.

Little by little, the flowers and trees outside the window gradually withered and turned into lush green leaves.

Every two days, Gu Changyun would report the results of the search for doctors to Jiang Suizhou. In the past few days, his reports gradually turned more into complaints. He said that there was a doctor who sent himself to the door, claiming to be the living Hua Tuo and saying that he could eliminate all diseases, like a charlatan.

Just look at the tall and strong apprentice who resembled a hired thug behind him, and one would think he was unreliable.

But this man seemed to have some deceptive skills. Gu Changyun wanted to expose his lies, but after several days, he couldn't find any flaws in him. He merely listened to the man's hype and also his insistence on seeing his master.

Gu Changyun told Jiang Suizhou that he couldn't stand it, so he asked him to meet him. It would also be better if he could drive this charlatan away quickly, so that he could return to quiet. Jiang Suizhou's interest was piqued. He wanted to see with his own eyes what this charlatan looked like.

So, he agreed. The next morning, someone brought the doctor over to Jiang Suizhou's room.

He was an old man in his sixties with gray hair.

Because of Gu Changyun's news in advance, Jiang Suizhou's eyes couldn't help wandering around behind the old man.

Then he saw the disciple behind him. He was in his twenties. He was tall and broad-shouldered. He looked powerful. His facial features were sharp and hard. He didn't have the making of a medical apprentice, but rather a soldier.

Jiang Suizhou felt inwardly amused, so he took another look.

The two kneeled down in front of him and bowed. Jiang Suizhou casually waved his hand to let them get up and asked lightly.

"I heard Changyun say that you have the ability to eliminate all diseases. Is that right?" He lazily lifted his tea and said indifferently, "You should be aware, this Prince hates being cheated."

After saying that, he glanced at those two. His gaze swept and actually found that the apprentice behind that old doctor looked backwards, seemingly looking at Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou frowned: “What are you looking at?”

The disciple hastily withdrew his gaze and lowered his head, as if he was suddenly reprimanded and frightened.

But Jiang Suizhou’s frown deepened.

In that moment when the apprentice quickly withdrew his gaze and lowered his head, Jiang Suizhou seemed to have caught a glimmer of tears in his eyes.

He had the appearance of a person trying to hold back tears, his eyes reddening from the restraint.

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Chapter 56

Jiang Suizhou paused, frowned, and looked down at the doctor's disciple's face.

But the disciple's head was hanging too low, and he couldn't see anything except the glimmer of tears just moments ago.

Jiang Suizhou was about to look again when he heard the old man speak up. "Please extend your hand out, Your Highness."

Jiang Suizhou looked at him and saw him with lowered eyebrows and eyes, respectfully waiting in the same place, seemingly waiting to take his pulse.

He faintly glanced at his disciple, then slowly extended his hand and rested it on the pillow that the old doctor had laid out.

"Your disciple is quite tall," Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze and commented indifferently as if without thought.

The old man put his finger on his wrist and smiled respectfully: "Your Highness, you wouldn't believe it. This boy was originally a farmer. He fled from the north some years ago and came here. I saved his life, so he followed me."

The old man glanced at his apprentice and said, "He's from the countryside. He hasn't seen anything in the world, so I hope Your Highness won't blame him."

Jiang Suizhou chuckled lightly but did not speak again.

A moment later, the doctor withdrew his hand that was taking the pulse and knelt down respectfully in front of Jiang Suizhou.

“Speak.” Jiang Suizhou lifted his hand and accepted the hot tea that Meng Qianshan handed.

The doctor replied, “I have diagnosed Your Highness’s pulse and have some humble opinions, but…” he paused and then said, “Your Highness needs to dismiss the crowd.”

Jiang Suizhou glanced at him with downcast eyes: “Why? What must be said in private?”

The doctor answered unhurriedly, “Although Your Highness’s pulse is weak, your pulse is weak and unstable on the surface. It appears that there are possible causes other than contracting an illness.”

At this point, he cautiously stopped talking and raised his eyes to Jiang Suizhou, quietly waiting for the latter’s next instructions.

His gaze was calm and penetrating, which stunned Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou immediately understood that this old doctor had seen the fishy origin of his illness.

His heart skipped a beat; his gaze was a bit flustered, and for the first time, he looked toward Huo Wujiu.

He did not expect that this doctor, who was seemingly a charlatan, actually had a few tricks up his sleeve.

Fortunately, Huo Wujiu sat there quietly, reading a book with his eyes cast down, and was seemingly oblivious to their exchange. Jiang Suizhou assumed he did not hear the hints in the doctor’s statement.

Presently, his room was full of people. In addition to the silly Meng Qianshan, there were many maids and servants. The matter of him poisoning himself was a private discussion between him and Gu Changyun, and no one else knew about it. Of course, it was inappropriate to make it public for more people to hear.

He pondered for a moment and lightly ordered, “All of you, go out.”

Meng Qianshan was stunned. “Your Highness?”

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes traveled between the old doctor and his disciple, and he said lightly, “Since this old gentleman wants to talk to me in private, let me talk to him. You lead this gentleman’s disciple to the side room, and let him drink a cup of tea for now.”

Meng Qianshan immediately replied, dismissed the servants, and bowed to invite the doctor’s disciple out.

Then he realized that Huo Wujiu was still left in the room.

Meng Qianshan hesitated for a moment.

Er…Madam Huo had stayed in his master’s room day after day and now although his master wanted to dismiss everyone, he wasn’t sure if his Madam was considered among the people to dismiss.

He promptly looked askance at Jiang Suizhou.

However, before he could make a move, Huo Wujiu, in the corner, put the book aside, pressed his wheelchair and rolled out in silence.

Meng Qianshan sighed with relief.

This master, whom the Prince placed on the tip of his heart, was one he couldn’t provoke. But fortunately, although this master was aloof, he was very conscientious, leaving him, a servant, with a lot of room to perform his duties.

—

According to Jiang Suizhou’s instructions, Meng Qianshan led the doctor’s disciple all the way to the side tea room and asked him to take a seat for the time being.

Madam Huo was also ‘kicked out’ with the rest, so Meng Qianshan naturally couldn’t leave him alone. As soon as Meng Qianshan went out, he

diligently invited Madam Huo to the tea room and poured a cup of tea for both of them.

After pouring the tea, Meng Qianshan hung his hands and stood by his side.

Huo Wujiu's gaze swept over the man sitting in a restrained manner at the other end of the tea table, then raised his eyes to look at Meng Qianshan.

This kid's face had always been unable to hide anything. He'd better fool him.

Although he was waiting here at the moment, he couldn't hide his anxiety. At first glance, he was worried about Jiang Suizhou's situation in the room. He wanted to go and stand guard, but because he received no order, he had to endure it here.

Huo Wujiu spoke gently, "Go and do what you ought to do."

Meng Qianshan was taken aback, and snapped a glance at him.

Madam Huo, who was sitting there quietly, put down the tea cup without lifting his eyes and said, "You're not needed here."

Meng Qianshan felt as if he was granted an amnesty.

When he heard the doctor, who appeared skilled at seeing patients, express his opinion, his heart was already hanging by a thread. He just wanted to stand guard at the door and wait for the Prince to call him. But the Prince drove him out together with the others. He had to take care of his other master, too, so he naturally didn't dare to leave easily.

But it was different now. His master had spoken!

Meng Qianshan was aware that in the absence of the Prince, nothing definitely could go wrong in obeying this master. He just assumed that this master must have considered him too much of an eyesore. When he hurriedly exited, he still didn't forget to be grateful and thanked Madam Huo repeatedly.

However, Madam Huo didn’t spare him a glance.

Huo Wujiu looked down at the tea on the table, and out of the corner of his eye, he quietly watched Meng Qianshan exit from the tea room and thoughtfully close the door after him.

The sound of footsteps drifted away.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked at the man sitting across the tea table.

He did not say anything and only fixed a pair of dark eyes at him.

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Chapter 57

The man placed the tea cup in his hand on the table, and when he raised his eyes again, they were tearful and red.

He stood up and knelt down heavily toward Huo Wujiu.

“General, this subordinate came late. I deserve to die!”

His voice was lowered with great effort, and as he knelt down, two beads of hot tears suddenly slipped from his eyes and dripped to the floor.

Huo Wujiu slowly closed his eyes.

“You’re still alive?” His tone sounded calm, but his voice trembled slightly.

The man in front of him was Wei Kai, his lieutenant, who had been following him since he was at Yangguan.

This time, Wei Kai’s troops were the first batch of advance troops to follow him across the river. When he was ambushed, and the reinforcements were cut off, the army split up, and Wei Kai brought up the rear for him. Since then, Huo Wujiu never heard from him again.

He never dared to hope that this person was still alive, and he never thought that he would see him alive in front of him one day.

Huo Wujiu looked calm, but his hand on the wheelchair tightly gripped the wooden armrest.

Wei Kai kneeled on the ground and wept, “This subordinate is still alive, but I’m ashamed to face you again, General!”

Huo Wujiu took a deep breath: “Get up and talk.”

Wei Kai wiped a handful of tears and got up from the ground. He stood three steps away from Huo Wujiu, and then sobbed while attempting to step forward to face him.

Huo Wujiu slowly instructed, “Sit back down and wipe your tears clean.”

Wei Kai had no choice but to stiffly move back.

He sat down at his original position at the tea table and wiped his eyes a few times before he could stop his tears.

Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes, unmovingly suppressing the heat that had risen in his eyes.

Perhaps it was because he had been detained in an enemy country for too long. He seemed to have been cut off from his original years with shining spears and armoured horses. He was born in the sands as a child, and soldiers and weapons were his hands and feet. He’d been steeling himself for revenge and quietly biding his time, but never thought that there would still be some strength left from the wounds of his severed limbs.

It was the feeling of something that belonged to him, slowly returning to its place.

This feeling could have driven people to tears, but Huo Wujiu had never been accustomed to shedding tears, let alone showing even a hint of fragility in front of people.

He lowered his eyes for a moment, and when he raised them again, there was only composure and calmness left in his eyes.

He asked, “How many people are left?”

Wei Kai swallowed the choke in his throat and whispered, “There are less than 20 men left. At that time, the battlefield was chaotic. Southern Jing’s military forces only cared about catching you and bringing you back to receive rewards, so a few of my men hid among the piles of corpses and

saved themselves. In recent days, I have thought of some ways to sneak our men into Lin'an City. Now, although we are few in number, we can be at your disposal at any time, General."

Huo Wujiu gave a muffled grunt.

Wei Kai continued, "After we entered the city, we tried every means to inquire about you. We learned that you were detained in the palace, and then heard no more news afterward. Until a few days ago… General, I have just learned that this Jingwang humiliated you… "

At this point, Wei Kai choked up again, unable to speak.

When Huo Wujiu raised his eyes at him, he saw Wei Kai, covering his face with one hand. He was about to start crying again, looking as if he had suffered some unprecedented shame and humiliation.

They had known each other from childhood. When Wei Kai was seriously injured, with broken arms and legs, he just gritted his teeth and carried on. He never saw him shed a tear. It was only until today that Huo Wujiu realized for the first time that his subordinate was also a man made of water.

He was somewhat speechless and said without mercy, "Control yourself."

Wei Kai gave a stifled sob in response.

Huo Wujiu sighed slowly.

"I wasn't insulted in any way. Don't have to take it to heart," he said.

"But General, your leg…"

"Didn't you bring someone here?" Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and glanced at him.

Wei Kai nodded repeatedly.

"I found this man outside Lin'an City. He is a highly skilled doctor, especially in treating injuries. He can heal withered bones and connect

meridians. General, don’t worry, he will definitely be able to cure you!”

Huo Wujiu responded with a hum. After a pause, he drawled awkwardly, “If Jingwang hadn’t asked for medical treatment this time, you wouldn’t have sneaked in so easily.”

Wei Kai nodded repeatedly once more.

“After I found this doctor, I have been trying to find you at Jingwang Manor. But since the Jingwang Manor is heavily guarded and surrounded by people sent from the palace to monitor you, it’s been impossible to find a chance.”

Speaking of this, Wei Kai seemed to have determined a very important realization. He pressed one hand on the edge of the table, raised his eyes to Huo Wujiu and said firmly.

“General, it’s considered this dog Jingwang’s mistake that has allowed me a chance to save you. Grandpa Huo has taught me since I was young to know how to repay kindness. After this matter is completed, I will remember his grace today and leave his corpse intact!”

He looked firmly at Huo Wujiu, just waiting for a compliment from his unsmiling general, who had always been clear in his rewards and punishments.

However, he found that Huo Wujiu’s face, which was already expressionless, gradually became colder and colder.

Wei Kai was at a loss for words.

Then he heard Huo Wujiu’s words that were slowly squeezed out from the gap between his lips.

“I haven’t seen you for months, but you’re now better at deciding everything by yourself,” he said.

Facing the ice-blade-like eyes of his own General, Wei Kai had a rough thought in mind.

He didn’t do anything wrong that could cause such hatred from the General. It must be that Jingwang did something behind his General’s back and tormented him to death!

Wei Kai clenched his teeth and compromised.

“Alright…if leaving his corpse intact isn’t okay, then we can cut him to pieces, too. This subordinate is the best at it. Don’t worry, General!”

The author has something to say: Real steel, straight man Wei Kai muttered in confusion: Why is the General getting more and more angry?

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Chapter 58

The only two people left in the bedroom were Jiang Suizhou and the old man.

“Please speak, doctor,” Jiang Suizhou prompted the moment the door of the room was closed.

The old doctor knelt in front of his bed and said, “If I am not mistaken, Your Highness’s current illness is caused by poisoning.”

Jiang Suizhou fell silent for a moment, nodded and said, “Doctor, you have excellent medical skills. I was indeed poisoned some days ago. I just don’t know if you have a cure for it.”

The doctor pondered for a long time and said, “Although Your Highness is poisoned, the poison is very strange. It’s floating on the surface and messing with Your Highness’s pulse, but not hurting your body. During this period, you only need to recuperate and wait for the effects of the medicine to subside. Just…”

He paused and raised his head to look at Jiang Suizhou.

“Your Highness has been weak since childhood, right?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded: “Indeed.”

The old doctor frowned and said thoughtfully, “Although Your Highness’s weakness is seemingly congenital, honestly… it’s a bit like it’s caused by drugs.”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

“You mean…?”

The old doctor nodded.

“For the specifics, I still need to prepare some medicine for Your Highness. After taking the medicine, only then can we know where the crux of Your Highness’ physical weakness lies,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou was rendered momentarily speechless.

He really did not expect that the original owner’s so-called congenital weakness was also tampered with. But on further consideration, the mother of the original owner was favored by the previous Emperor at that time, and her beauty was unparalleled. It was only right to assume that a tall tree attracted the wind[1] and incurred the jealousy of others.

So, since it was not congenital, was there a cure for his weakness?

Jiang Suizhou didn’t want to be this weak for the rest of his life, coughing after taking only two steps.

He was surprised for a moment, and only after a while did he find his voice and ask, “If you say so, Doctor, is there a cure for my illness?”

The old man shook his head and replied, “I am only thirty percent sure.”

This was promising for Jiang Suizhou.

He wasn’t at all affronted, and so he said, “Thirty percent is fine. From today onward, you can stay in Jingwang Manor with peace of mind and just treat my illness. If there is anything you need, just ask.”

The old man bowed and thanked him for his favor.

Then he heard Jiang Suizhou pause and asked, “Do you have any other specialties?”

The old man was stunned and asked, “What is Your Highness asking about…?”

Jiang Suizhou cleared his throat; his expression indifferent; and his tone calm and waveless.

“There is a cripple in my room, as you have seen,” he said indifferently.

The old doctor lowered his head in response.

Jiang Suizhou frowned, and then said: “This man is just crippled. Every cloudy and rainy day these days, his legs will hurt. It’s really annoying to hear him toss and turn in the middle of the night. Doctor, please examine his legs. If you can find a way to relieve him some, it’ll save him from disturbing my rest.”

The old man, kneeling on the ground, obviously froze.

Jiang Suizhou only thought he was surprised because he wanted to let him heal a prisoner of war. He pondered for a moment and said unhurriedly, “Heal him, by all means. I love peace and quiet. If you can cure him of his disease, your reward will be indispensable.”

After saying that, he lowered his eyes and looked at the old man.

The old doctor, kneeling on the ground, kowtowed: “I’ll be at Your Highness’s disposal.”

—

After the consultation, it was the first time in a while that the doctor was given a place to stay.

Knowing that this doctor was quite capable, Meng Qianshan naturally treated them both as guests. When the consultation was finished and Jiang Suizhou asked him to make arrangements, Meng Qianshan generously invited the two guests into a spacious courtyard, and also assigned a few maids to wait on them.

This treatment gave off the impression that they were distinguished guests.

After arranging the courtyard, Meng Qianshan didn't forget to ask someone to prepare all the daily needs of the two. It wasn't until it was late in the day that he smilingly bade farewell.

The old man led his disciple into the room.

The moment the door was closed, Wei Kai turned around and hurriedly asked what had happened between the old man and Jiang Suizhou in the room.

The old doctor sat down at the table, poured himself a cup of tea, and told Wei Kai one by one what he had talked to Jiang Suizhou just now.

"So Jingwang was really drugged?" Wei Kai couldn't help but ask.

The old doctor nodded.

"Someone had drugged him from the time he was born. Otherwise, how can any child who has been pampered and born from his mother's womb in good health fall ill with such an unexplainable disease?" he said, stroking his beard.

"However…it's a bit fishy that he was drugged this time."

"How so?" Wei Kai asked urgently.

The old doctor pondered for a moment and shook his head.

His mysterious reaction made Wei Kai anxious, and he said angrily, "Li Changning, don't beat around the bush!"

The doctor named Li Changning snorted when he heard his words, and replied, "Can't I speculate? Who knows who inflicted such painless poison on him?"

His remarks rendered Wei Kai speechless.

Then Li Changning said, "But…it seems so coincidental."

“What?” Wei Kai did not understand.

“Jingwang isn’t seriously ill, but he asked for medical treatment. We had no way to find the General, but we were able to take this opportunity to get close to him,” Li Changning said slowly, “Just now, Jingwang specifically mentioned that the General’s leg injury always flares up, and asked me to examine the General’s legs in the next couple of days. Say, how can everything be so coincidental that it all turned out to be beneficial for the General?”

Upon hearing this, Wei Kai fell into deep thought.

“It is indeed too coincidental…” he echoed, “And just now, the General was also a bit strange.”

“What?” Li Changning asked.

Wei Kai looked at him with doubts all over his face.

“Just now, when I told the General that Jingwang had been kind to us, so I would leave his body intact later on, the General was a little upset,” he said. “I also said that I would tear him to pieces, and the General’s eyes seemed to have turned even more frightening.”

Speaking of this, Wei Kai paused and hissed.

“Then…the General also asked me whether you can cure the Prince’s illness.”

He looked at Li Changning.

“You say, what exactly does the General want, ah?”

Li Changning showed disdain.

“Why are you asking me when you’re the one who has been with the General for so many years?” he said, “I’ve only met him for the first time today, yet you expect me to guess what’s in his mind?”

Wei Kai frowned and shook his head.

“If I must guess, it would be that the General wants to cure him and then torment him to death with his own hands.” he said. “And then, later on, he’ll chop his corpse and hang it on their Southern Jing’s walls.”

“But …”

His words took a turn.

“Why do I feel, again, that it’s not quite like that?”

—

Footnote:

[1] a person in a high position is liable to be attacked Want to read more chapters and support us? Please consider becoming a patron to read up to 24 chapters in advance!

Chapter 59

It was nighttime at Anyin Hall.

Jiang Suizhou was in a festive mood, and many things worthy of happiness were emerging.

The arrival of a doctor, who had excellent medical skills and was even expected to cure Huo Wujiu's legs, was already worth celebrating. And just now, Xu Du sent him news that the Hou Zhu took the bait.

The Ministry of Justice official returned to the palace that day and reported the news he heard at Jingwang Manor to the Hou Zhu at the first opportunity. The Hou Zhu must have been very excited after knowing this. Within a few days, he appointed the same official to lead the troops and seize the manor in Changle Square.

In the middle of Changle Square, facing the south; the information he gave to Hou Zhu was detailed enough.

Xu Du had arranged for people to monitor Changle Square, and in the past few days, there were already several informants from the Ministry of Justice stepping in there. Presumably, when they have completely determined their target, it would be time for the real owner of the manor to be arrested.

Jiang Suizhou felt refreshed.

He went to the study, and when he came back, he saw Huo Wujiu sitting on the edge of his couch, reading a book.

Thinking of the rather reliable doctor who had come to the house, Jiang Suizhou sat on the edge of the bed, and his gaze couldn't help but fall on

Huo Wujiu's body.

He didn't know how skilled the doctor was, but could he perhaps heal Huo Wujiu's legs in advance? As long as his meridians could be restored to before, then neither the Jingwang Manor nor the Southern Jing could confine him.

If that were true, then the Southern Jing would be finished in less than three years. What Hou Zhu? What Pang Shao? None of them could flaunt their power around him anymore.

Jiang Suizhou could not help but feel a little happy.

However, when he thought about it, by then, he would not have the opportunity to spend time with Huo Wujiu as he was doing now.

Although he was afraid of Huo Wujiu from the beginning, Huo Wujiu was really a good man. During this period, although they had little communication, they coexisted peacefully. Even now, with only one look in his eyes, he could roughly guess what Huo Wujiu was thinking.

Thinking of this, Jiang Suizhou felt a little empty inside for a while.

After all, in addition to his servants, Huo Wujiu was the only person who had the closest relationship with him for so long after transmigrating into this era.

Nonetheless, when all was said and done, a golden cage couldn't hold a falcon forever, and Huo Wujiu originally didn't belong to this place either…

Jiang Suizhou was lost in thought for a moment, and did not notice that the person he was watching raised his dark eyes as soon as he felt his sight and met his gaze straight up.

The sudden stare scared Jiang Suizhou into a shiver.

He realized that Huo Wujiu had, at some point, raised his eyes from the book in his hands and was looking at him quietly.

Jiang Suizhou felt a momentary embarrassment.

But he immediately calmed down and looked lightly at Huo Wujiu. He said, “The doctor who came today will take a look at your leg injury tomorrow.”

Huo Wujiu did not make a sound for a while.

Jiang Suizhou continued, “However, you should not expect too much. The doctors in the palace can’t cure you, so he doesn’t necessarily have the ability either.”

After speaking, he withdrew his gaze and was about to lie back on the bed.

But at that moment, Huo Wujiu suddenly opened his mouth to speak.

“My legs were crippled under His Majesty’s orders,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou was given a start: “What?”

He looked at Huo Wujiu and saw that Huo Wujiu was staring at him silently.

“His intention was for me to suffer a fate worse than death in your place, and you know it,” Huo Wujiu said.

This was something that the two of them had never said outright, but was a fact that they both tacitly knew.

Jiang Suizhou sat up straight and said, “So what?”

Huo Wujiu slowly let out a breath, seemingly somewhat helpless.

“After my legs are cured, have you ever thought about how to explain it to him?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou inwardly laughed.

Explain? What would I explain to a dead man? You, Huo Wujiu, are the butcher’s knife hanging over his head. I have shifted dropping your knife

down at an earlier date to get this incapable ruler killed; that is to give an explanation to the people of today.

With this in mind, a smile also surfaced on his face.

“I won’t explain.” The corner of his lips curled, and under the dark and gloomy light, he radiated a rippling brilliance. “I would like to see how he will deal with me.”

After saying that, he faintly glanced at Huo Wujiu and lay back on the bed.

Jiang Suizhou felt that his eyes were full of the wisdom of someone from the future who knew the spoilers.

It never occurred to him that Huo Wujiu, sitting in a wheelchair, wouldn’t return to his senses for a while because of the look in his eyes.

It took a long while before he lowered his eyes.

Perhaps the lights in the room were too bright. He thought.

Otherwise, how could it illuminate those eyes of that silly rabbit, who was courting his own ruin, so brightly?

—-

The author has something to say:

Jiang Suizhou: I’m so crazy, oh.

Huo Wujiu: He loves me so much.

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Chapter 60

According to Li Changning, he needed to administer medicine to Jiang Suizhou for a period of time before he could conclude how to cure his weakness.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t mean that, so he didn’t take his words to heart. He just asked him to prescribe his medicine daily according to his diagnosis, and then observe the aftereffect.

Li Changning naturally did as he was told.

And on the first day of dispensing medicine to Jiang Suizhou, Jiang Suizhou retained him.

“Go check his legs,” Jiang Suizhou, who had received the decocted soup, said to Li Changning.

There was no one else in the room except for Meng Qianshan. Li Changning contemplated his stern voice and then saw Wei Kai secretly winking at him.

As early as yesterday, when he first consulted with Jingwang, he mentioned his ‘Madam Huo’s’ leg problems. Yesterday, Wei Kai and he also discussed this matter in private.

When he met his eyes, Li Changning understood. After bowing towards Jiang Suizhou, he moved toward Huo Wujiu’s couch.

Meng Qianshan served Jiang Suizhou. He drank the soup and then waited for Li Changning to examine Huo Wujiu.

He watched as Li Changning kneeled in front of Huo Wujiu, fiddling and examining him up and down. He asked Huo Wujiu a few questions from time to time, and then retrieved a booklet from his medical kit. He wrote some notes and drew pictures on it.

After a long time, Li Changning packed up his things and stood up.

“How is it?” Jiang Suizhou hurriedly asked.

Li Changning gathered up the medical kit by his side and handed it over to Wei Kai. He got up and turned to Jiang Suizhou, bowing. His tone was tinged with a bit of hesitation when he spoke, “Madam’s leg problems…I’m afraid it’s difficult to heal.”

Jiang Suizhou’s brow wrinkled, and his complexion gradually turned heavy.

Then he heard Li Changning sigh and continue, “The meridians in Madam’s legs are damaged, and I’m afraid it will be difficult to heal them. With all my life’s work, I can only relieve him of one or two ailments.”

Hearing these words, Jiang Suizhou asked, “How are you going to relieve them?”

Li Changning replied, “I know the art of acupuncture and moxibustion, so I can help Madam to relieve his pain. That way, when it’s cloudy and rainy, he will suffer less.”

Jiang Suizhou heaved a sigh of relief deep inside.

He knew that Huo Wujiu’s legs would unlikely be cured, but he also placed a lot of hope on the doctor in front of him. It was just a pity that the doctor he sought early wasn’t the person he really wanted to find.

He could only comfort himself inwardly.

Forget it, didn’t this doctor say that he could relieve Huo Wujiu’s illness? This wasn’t entirely useless. After all, every time it rained, Huo Wujiu’s legs hurt badly. It was good to alleviate his symptoms a bit.

With this thought in mind, Jiang Suizhou nodded. His expression remained indifferent, and he said impassively, “It doesn’t matter. I also have no intention to cure him. Since this is the case, feel free to give him medical treatment. Whatever the results, I won’t pursue it.”

Hearing these words, Li Changning seemed to be relieved and bowed to thank him.

Jiang Suizhou waved his hand to let him get up. The words that came out of his mouth carried a bitter taste, but deep inside he was palpitating. Did the doctor say just now that he could give Huo Wujiu acupuncture?

Since needles would be used, a more spacious place was, of course, needed, for him to perform the procedure freely. Although the couch in the room wasn’t narrow, there was no reason for the doctor to treat Huo Wujiu on it every day.

In that case…

Jiang Suizhou held his cup of tea and pondered over it.

Could he take this opportunity to have Huo Wujiu move out?

—

When Huo Wujiu first moved into his mansion, Jiang Suizhou let him stay in his room temporarily because he couldn’t find an excuse otherwise.

However, this time, a legitimate excuse was handed to him.

Jiang Suizhou began to seriously think about the feasibility of this matter.

After all, he initially got Huo Wujiu to his side, all in order to protect him on his own turf. Now that Huo Wujiu had gotten used to living here and became more familiar with him, it would be perfectly reasonable and safe if he took this opportunity to arrange another residence for Huo Wujiu in his manor.

In passing, he could also have a little showdown with Huo Wujiu to try his luck and sound him out.

Thus, Jiang Suizhou made up his mind and dismissed all the people who were waiting for him during the evening meal that day.

Beneath the glowing candle flames, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou’s stance told him that he had something to tell him.

Huo Wuguo thought to himself, *Just in time.*

He also had something to say to Jiang Suizhou.

Just listening to what the old man said to Jiang Suizhou today, he knew that those two people had reservations about Jiang Suizhou today.

Huo Wujiu knew that Wei Kai would never do anything that he wasn’t sure of. The doctor he brought with him would never fail to cure his leg.

The two of them said this, all to guard against Jiang Suizhou, fearing that when they could cure his legs, he would take precautions against them. Similarly, the old doctor must have been able to cure Jiang Suizhou’s illness, but was fishing for his words. He was 80% sure he was waiting for his orders.

However, they didn’t know that Jiang Suizhou had never been a threat to them.

Even yesterday, Jiang Suizhou directly told him he would cure his leg, and even was prepared to confront Jiang Shunheng on his behalf after curing him.

Huo Wujiu could no longer hold himself back.

He wanted to tell Jiang Suizhou that the doctor could definitely cure him and also himself.

He also wanted to tell Jiang Suizhou that he didn’t have to be afraid. Jiang Shunheng, whether to him or to Jiang Suizhou, would always be a threatening enemy. Once he had recovered the strength to contend with him, he wouldn’t let Jiang Suizhou be caught in the crossfire.

In contrast, he would protect him well.

Huo Wujiu had always been cautious and meticulous. In the past, he would never let people in the rival camp find out the tiniest bit of the actual situation.

But for some reason, Jiang Suizhou was different.

Perhaps becaused Jiang Shunheng picked on him, so even if he was in the enemy camp, he would never be in cahoots with them; or perhaps it was because this person was very simple. Although Jiang Suizhou insisted that he was a bad person, he was devoid of the least bit of lethality and was worthy of trust.

Or perhaps…it was because he seemed to, well, really like him.

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Chapter 61

Huo Wujiu thought that he had always been a character who disliked owing others. This Jingwang took the liberty of liking him and sacrificed so much for him, making him unable to bear deceiving him. He even wanted to entrust all his unsavory background to him.

Not just because Huo Wujiu trusted him, but more because he didn't want to hide it from him.

This "not wanting to hide from him" thought had been poking around in Huo Wujiu's heart since yesterday when Jiang Suizhou told him that he would let the doctor treat his legs.

It was a spark of fire that flared up in Huo Wujiu's heart, scorching his heart to a frightening degree.

He had hidden that tongue of flame in the depths of his heart, and at this time, only a pair of extremely well-disguised black eyes quietly looked at Jiang Suizhou.

When there was no longer a third person in the room, Jiang Suizhou deliberated before speaking.

"You have heard the doctor's diagnosis today," he said indifferently.

Huo Wujiu responded with a hum.

He paused and was about to speak, but heard Jiang Suizhou continue.

"Although he can't cure you, it's more or less a two-way street of hope," he said, "Anyway, since acupuncture and moxibustion are required, this Prince thought it would be more convenient for you to live in another place."

A gust of wind seemed to blow by, puffing the tongue of flame burning in Huo Wujiu's heart into a flicker.

He faltered and again answered with a hum.

"Indeed," he said.

Jiang Suizhou nodded his head.

"This Prince has asked Meng Qianshan to arrange a room for you in the courtyard, so you can just stay there and get well at ease. When this Prince told the doctor to heal you at will, it was nothing more than covering up the scene. If he really dares not to do his best, you just tell Meng Qianshan," he said.

Oh, he would still live in his courtyard, ah.

The fleeting gust of wind dissipated without a trace.

Huo Wujiu looked indifferent and said, "En."

Jiang Suizhou assessed his expression and tentatively opened his mouth next.

"I never told you before why I moved you to Anyin Hall, right?" he said.

Jiang Suizhou knew that it was most appropriate to say these words at this time.

Had he told Huo Wujiu from day one that he wanted to treat him kindly, Huo Wujiu wouldn't have believed him, and instead became more wary of him. If he also didn't say it now, they'd be meeting less afterward and have no way to talk about it. It'd be painstaking to talk to him next time.

At this moment, telling Huo Wujiu that he wanted to help him and cooperate with him was the most appropriate opportunity. After all, his recent circumstances and good deeds were all visible to Huo Wujiu.

But then he faltered when he saw Huo Wujiu's unpleasant expression, which looked as if he had beat someone up.

After a moment, he raised his eyes to him with his brow furrowed and softly said, "No."

Jiang Suizhou was about to speak when he heard Huo Wujiu then say, "… Don't say anything."

How can this work! Jiang Suizhou was anxious.

I must tell you clearly, ah! If I don't, how can you know my good intentions? How can you see how I swallowed humiliation? How can you be grateful to me, ah?!

He hurriedly said, "I have to say it. Since things have reached this point, I think you've understood a thing or two of what I want to do."

Huo Wujiu's brow furrowed even deeper.

What exactly did this Jing Wang want to do?

Is he going to use today to express his feelings to me?

For some reason, Huo Wujiu felt a little flustered and couldn't even think of a countermeasure for a while. But strangely enough, that spark of fire that he hid blazed even hotter, as if oil was poured on it.

This made Huo Wujiu's heart beat faster.

How could this Jingwang be so stupid? Wasn't he afraid of being rejected and losing face? This in turn made Huo Wujiu's heart soft. He even felt that, no matter what he said, he couldn't say no…

But then, he heard Jingwang speak.

"My royal brother humiliated you and wanted to use the method of raising Gu to make me fight you. Naturally, I don't want to give him what he wants."

That clear and fresh voice sounded like a mountain spring, cool, calm and gentle.

“I moved you to the Prince’s courtyard to protect your integrity. Although I am a man of the Southern Jing, I am regarded as a thorn in the eye and a thorn in the flesh by my royal brother, and he wishes he could get rid of me right away. Although I can drag out my ignoble existence here, I also know that I will be killed sooner or later.”

“As far as I am concerned, wiping out the Jing Dynasty is my way out. General Huo, these days, I think you’ve seen that I’m different from them. I have no intention of killing or humiliating you, but want to cooperate with you.”

That cool and refreshing voice akin to a mountain stream flowed into Huo Wujiu’s heart.

For a moment he only felt empty in his heart.

He only heard Jingwang slowly say, “I can keep you safe for the time being, and I can help you heal your legs in the future. All I’m asking for is a way to survive, nothing more.”

“Zzz,” came a sound.

The spring water suddenly dripped over Huo Wujiu’s limbs and bones, gently flowed through his heart, and then suddenly extinguished that raging fire.

Huo Wujiu’s voice sounded a bit muffled.

“…Nothing else?” he asked.

The next thing he knew, he met a puzzled pair of clean and unadulterated eyes.

“Nothing else, ah.”

———————-

The author has something to say.

Jiang Suizhou: What’s that sound?

Huo Wujiu [expressionless]: The sound of a young man’s heart breaking.

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Chapter 62

Jiang Suizhou felt a thud in his heart. Then, flickers of happiness arose within.

Could it be? He knew that Huo Wujiu would be suspicious of him and would never believe that he was just trying to save his life from the Hou Zhu.

It was true that he did not want to save his life under the Hou Zhu. After all, although the Hou Zhu tormented him, he would not torment him to death.

What he wanted was to retrieve his head from being under Huo Wujiu's butcher's knife.

This made no difference to Huo Wujiu whatsoever.

Luckily, I said it at this moment. Jiang Suizhou thought to himself.

Looking at Huo Wujiu's deepening frown, Jiang Suizhou was convinced that it must be because he could not trust him yet. That meant Huo Wujiu still doubted what he had said.

This was as it should be. After all, for Huo Wujiu, he was in the rival camp. It would have been strange if Huo Wujiu believed him immediately after he said so.

With that in mind, Jiang Suizhou composed himself seriously and said, "This Prince knows that you may not believe my words. When all is said and done, it sounds somewhat absurd to you. But…"

Huo Wujiu, however, suddenly interrupted him.

“I believe you.” His voice was smooth, but seemed colder than usual.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned: “This Prince is saying…”

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes to look at him and said, “Cooperate. What you were going to say is for us to cooperate, right?”

Jiang Suizhou nodded: “Yes, but…”

But, why was there something indescribably strange when the words came out of Huo Wujiu’s mouth?

Huo Wujiu looked at him with deep eyes and then said in a slow voice, “You’re trying your best to protect me. I can see that, although I don’t know why you have such confidence in me. If there really is a day like you said, I would never return kindness with ingratitude.”

Jiang Suizhou listened blankly.

Huo Wujiu’s remarks were reasonable, which was not only in line with his open and aboveboard personality, but also the attitude Jiang Suizhou had always wanted to win.

But…

Jiang Suizhou felt a lingering abnormality deep inside, but he couldn’t put a finger on it. Huo Wujiu’s remarks obviously were positive, but when they came out of his mouth, he felt a kind of unspeakable pent-up frustration. It even carried a trace of a piercingly cold chill.

Jiang Suizhou was in a daze when he saw Huo Wujiu glance at him lightly and asked, “Are you relieved?”

Jiang Suizhou nodded woodenly.

Huo Wujiu gave him an unfathomable glance, then put down the chopsticks in his hand. He placed one hand on his wheelchair, turned directions, and moved straight away.

Jiang Suizhou came back to his senses only a few moments later.

He picked up the cup of tea on the table and took a sip thoughtfully.

He didn’t doubt that Huo Wujiu would go back on his word, but…

After contemplating for a moment, he shook his head.

Maybe people like him who conquered the sands and fought in wars are so cold and fierce when they make promises to others?

——

Huo Wujiu didn’t regain his senses all night.

Absurd?

Indeed, he was a Prince of an enemy country, and although his situation wasn’t favorable, he was still pampered. His life was at least safe. It was indeed quite absurd that such a person would say such things as placing his hopes on an enemy general and even cooperating with a crippled prisoner of war.

…But even more ridiculous was, didn’t he believe him, too?

Huo Wujiu only felt that he was smitten by some spirit. His mind was obviously perfectly normal, but it was like he was struck with a stifling blow on matters related to Jingwang. He felt wooly-headed without rhyme or reason.

Now it seemed that what Jiang Suizhou said to the eunuch was nothing but a prevarication, and shielding him, as he had claimed, was also to prevent Jiang Shunheng from getting what he desired. He had nothing to rely on in this land, and it was only right to put his hopes on him.

But he himself was confused and believed in that nonsense that couldn’t stand up to scrutiny.

Huo Wujiu barely slept throughout the night. As soon as the day dawned, he immediately moved to the wing room that Meng Qianshan had arranged for him.

He knew that he should feel humiliated.

But the emotions that permeated his heart seemed not quite similar to humiliation.

Something surged up from the pit of his stomach and soaked the meridians in his chest till it numbed, like being densely pricked by a row of small needles. Although it didn't hurt much, it made him uncomfortable all over.

Before this, he hadn't yet experienced what it meant to be 'aggrieved'.

The Anyin Hall courtyard was so large that it was easy to find a comfortable and spacious room. Coupled with Meng Qianshan's attentiveness, it only took one night to arrange a vacant room on the east wing, facing the sun.

The room was nearly as big as the main house, and the light was especially bright. It was the best room for sunbathing among the wing rooms.

When Meng Qianshan prepared the room, he, more or less, wanted to please Madam Huo.

But Madam Huo didn't look the least bit happy.

The ancestor still had a cold face, and even the aura around him seemed a bit more intimidating than usual. Although Meng Qianshan did not know the reason, he still knew how to discern expressions, so after sending the ancestor over, he hurriedly retreated with the others.

The sun gradually rose, and Li Changning took Wei Kai to Anyin Hall.

It would take a few days for the herbs he prepared to have a noticeable effect. After taking Jiang Suizhou's pulse, Li Changning adjusted several of the medicines he used, then handed the prescription to Meng Qianshan and asked him to concoct the medicine for Jiang Suizhou.

After performing all these, a maid led the two of them to the room where Huo Wujiu was staying.

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Chapter 63

When they entered the room, Li Changning randomly found an excuse and sent all the servants out of the room. When only the three of them were left in the room, Li Changning carried his medical kit over and walked to Huo Wujiu's side.

"General Huo," he bowed and saluted Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu put down the book in his hand and raised his eyes to look at the two of them.

"General, Doctor Li has come to check your injuries!" Next to him, Wei Kai pushed the wheelchair beside the bed for Huo Wujiu with a smile.

"General, you still don't know, right? Yesterday, Doctor Li's words were used to fool Jingwang! Yesterday, he checked your injuries and knew with certainty that he could cure you of this kind of disability caused by sharp weapons!"

Huo Wujiu glanced at him lightly.

Wei Kai immediately understood what he meant and scratched the back of his head, laughing, "I know, My Lord must have guessed it a long time ago."

Just then, Huo Wujiu suddenly asked, "What about Jingwang's illness?"

Both men in the room were taken aback.

For a moment, Wei Kai and Li Changning looked at each other.

They both knew in their hearts that treating Jingwang was just a pretense, just a way to penetrate the Jingwang Manor.

Why did the General ask this?

After a short silence, the two of them met Huo Wujiu's dark eyes.

"Can he be cured, perhaps?" he asked.

Li Changning replied, "General, Jingwang's weakness was caused by a drug that was administered since childhood. It's impossible to cure it immediately, but as long as the right herbs are used and slowly regulated, we should be able to extract the root of his disease in about three to five years."

Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes and no longer spoke.

Li Changning glanced at him, and then at Wei Kai, and was momentarily at a loss deep inside.

"Then…Do you want me to cure him or not, General?"

Huo Wujiu hesitated, but when he raised his eyes again, his gaze was tinged with shades of cold intent.

Did he want it? What did he have to think about? He and Jingwang were now only in a 'cooperative' relationship. He just needed to protect him in the future. Who drugged him, or what illness he contracted was none of his business, right?

With this in mind, he spoke coldly.

"What has it got to do with my intentions?" he questioned.

Li Changning was left even more clueless.

Then he heard Huo Wujiu say, "Since you came to his house to treat him, shouldn't you be thinking about how to cure him? Could it be that you're waiting for him to take vengeance on you?"

Li Changning's heart shivered.

Sure enough. He knew that Jingwang was not a good stubble.

Nonetheless, why did the General's words sound like…like he wanted Jingwang to be cured?

Li Changning couldn't figure it out, so he could only follow Huo Wujiu's orders: "I understand! I will do my best to cure Jingwang!"

Wei Kai's eyes were about to pop out, and he itched to kick Li Changning.

Didn't you hear how much the General hated Jingwang? How dare you say that you want to cure him? What a thickhead!

But then he heard Huo Wujiu anwer with a hum.

"Don't tell him," he added.

Li Changning answered evenly.

Wei Kai was dumbfounded: "General, why is this?"

Huo Wujiu's lips moved, but he swallowed back the words that were on his lips.

He said so, naturally considering that the fewer people who knew about it, the better. After all, it would take a long time for Jiang Suizhou's body to heal, so Jiang Shunheng wouldn't notice it for a while. However, the moment he caught the least bit of wind of it, Jiang Shunheng would definitely try every means to stop it.

But…

Why was he considering so much for Jingwang?!

Waves of irritation surged inexplicably deep in Huo Wujiu's heart.

After a pause, he said coldly, “As a bargaining chip. It will be useful in the future.”

The two faces in front of him showed the look, *That explains it*. They thought that the General was superior in strategy. His foresight was truly beyond the reach of subordinates like them.

Only Huo Wujiu himself knew how chaotic his heart was.

Jingwang had none of those messy intentions towards him and only wanted to cooperate with him. This should have been an uncomplicated and worth celebrating matter for him. He was a little upset at first, and he thought it was just because he was confused like that silly eunuch, Meng Qianshan.

However, this feeling, which should have been forgotten in the blink of an eye, actually intensified with the passage of time.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t figure out why he felt like he had lost something important.

——

Jiang Suizhou woke up early in the morning and found that a person was missing from his room.

Huo Wujiu was gone.

Meng Qianshan told him that Madam Huo had woken up and had moved out early when he learned that his room was tidied up.

Jiang Suizhou felt that he should be relieved.

After all, as an adult, who didn’t want to have their own personal space? The torment of being forced to eat and live with Huo Wujiu for so long finally came to an end today.

Huo Wujiu moved out, and before he left, they also cleared things up between them. Huo Wujiu promised him that he would no longer have to

worry about being killed by Huo Wujiu himself, so for him, it should be a good day all in the same day.

However, he somehow felt that something was missing.

It might be because as soon as he transmigrated, he was forced to live with Huo Wujiu. At the same time, Huo Wujiu was too quiet and disciplined, and didn't add any trouble to him.

Because of this, when the person disappeared abruptly, he felt that the room was a little empty, as if something was missing.

This feeling haunted Jiang Suizhou's heart. He didn't notice it, but he unconsciously ate a lot less for breakfast.

But Meng Qianshan, who was waiting by his side, took everything in with a sharp eye.

When Jiang Suizhou drank his medicine and sat on the edge of the bed to read a book absently, Meng Qianshan came to his side and said with a smile, "Your Highness, you have nothing to do today anyway. The day is perfect outside, so why don't you go out to catch some rays, and while at it, go to the wing room to see how that doctor is treating Madam Huo's legs?"

———————————————————-

The author has something to say:

Li Changning: I have this lingering feeling that the General is speaking sourly.

Wei Kai: ? You know nothing! That's the General mapping out a strategy. It's called being unfathomable. It's called being cold and ruthless!

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Chapter 64

Jiang Suizhou responded subconsciously, “Okay.”

It was only after Jiang Suizhou voiced his consent did he realize what he had said. He couldn’t help but be stunned, and he put down the book in his hand.

He had made it clear to Huo Wujiu, and Huo Wujiu had promised to shelter him in the future, so there was no need for him to either brush up his presence in front of him or inquire about his well-being.

But…

Jiang Suizhou hesitated and was about to refuse, but his eyes involuntarily drifted to the couch beside the bed.

The couch had already been tidied up, smoothed out without a single wrinkle, and the beddings resting on it had also been put away.

It looked too neat, as if something was missing.

Jiang Suizhou’s gaze stopped in that direction and suddenly felt that his bedroom was particularly large, so large that it felt a bit empty.

He remained silent for a moment, making Meng Qianshan who stood next to him show a look of surprise.

Look-look! His Highness is missing his wife!

He was pleased with his excellent proposal. Grinning ear to ear, he didn’t wait for Jiang Suizhou’s next instructions. He turned around and found a

robe for Jiang Suizhou to wear outside. Meng Qianshan handed it to him, intending to wait for him to put it on.

Jiang Suizhou's eyes fell on Meng Qianshan's hands.

For a moment, he secretly persuaded himself inwardly.

Forget it. Isn't it just going to Huo Wujiu's place to check him out? This is my own territory. I can go wherever I want to go. There is no need to be overcautious and indecisive.

With this in mind, he stood up and put on the outer robe that Meng Qianshan handed to him.

Somehow, it might have been that the material of the robe was really comfortable on his body, because after putting it on, his mood that was cloudy and empty all morning seemed to have receded a lot in an instant.

Jiang Suizhou looked out the window.

I really ought to bask in the sun outside. He thought to himself.

——

Li Changning took out the acupuncture instruments in his medical kit. He asked Huo Wujiu to lie down on the bed; then, he rolled up Huo Wujiu's trousers for him, exposing his unhealed legs.

Huo Wujiu's legs had recovered quite well, but his epidermal scars still looked appalling. With just one glance, Wei Kai's eyes turned red, and he averted his gaze to the side with difficulty.

Li Changning examined him and said, "General, the injuries on your legs have not yet healed, so they should be easier to treat. If they were delayed for a year or a half, I'm afraid that even if they were cured, the root cause will remain."

Huo Wujiu didn't make a sound.

He knew that for him, this was what he owed Jingwang.

If Jingwang had not pretended to be ill and given Li Changning and Wei Kai the opportunity to enter the manor, it would have been even harder for them to meet. Even if Li Changning was capable of curing him, it would have been nowhere in sight and definitely not as effective as it was right now.

His father had taught him long ago never to owe others unless it was a last resort. The more you owe, the more entanglements you would have in the future, and the more you would have no command over yourself.

It was inadvisable to owe someone a favor.

Huo Wujiu closed his eyes.

But what he owed Jingwang now was already much less than he had thought. For him, this kind of favor could be easily repaid in the future. On the contrary, the unrequited love he once thought was the most indefined thing…

He should be glad, but he couldn't pep himself up.

It felt like there were a bunch of threads that bound him and sent his mind in a whirl. When it was suddenly withdrawn and gave him too much freedom, he didn't feel relaxed, but instead, somehow felt forsaken.

This kind of fluttering mood ruffled his feathers.

Li Changning continued speaking beside his bed, "It's just that you will suffer a lot if you want your leg injuries to heal. From now on, I will apply acupuncture and medicine to you every day, General. The needles are to unblock the meridians and blood vessels, and the medicine is to reshape the broken meridians."

After a pause, Li Changning then said, "General, the stabbing pain of restoring your meridians is entirely different from the skin and flesh injuries around. The degree of pain is no different from scraping your bones. I've

reconsidered it time and time again and plan to reduce the dosage by half. Although the speed will be slower, you, more or less, won't be so tortured…"

But Huo Wujiu interrupted him with his words.

"No need," he said.

Li Changning was stunned.

Then, he hurriedly explained, "General, the severe pain of reshaping meridians is very different from the abrasions around them. The pain level is no different from scraping bones. Even if the General has flesh and bones of steel, a person would take his own life to avoid suffering like this every day!"

But Huo Wujiu asked, "If you use normal medicine, how long would it take to heal them?"

Li Changning said, "Less than 20 days, more than a month."

Huo Wujiu asked, "What about halving it?"

Li Changning answered, "It takes about three months. But rest assured, General…"

Huo Wujiu spoke out and interrupted him.

"That won't do," he raised his eyes to Li Changning and rejected.

"We don't have that much spare time to spend here," he said. "Just heal me normally. No need to cut it in half."

Li Changning was a little puzzled.

Er…Although the Jingwang Manor wasn't a conducive place, it seemed to be calm and quiet nowadays.

Why was the General in a hurry?

He took a peek at Huo Wujiu again, but he saw that the latter had already closed his eyes and started to recuperate.

Li Changning could only obey. He turned around to sort out his silver needles.

He failed to notice that Huo Wujiu's left hand, which was hidden in his sleeves, was tightly clenched with some irritability.

He naturally had nothing urgent to do.

The Southern Jing wouldn't kill him for a while. The Northern Liang had just established a court and the treasury was empty. There were no outstanding generals except him, and nobody had the ability to save him in a short time.

But he just wanted to return Jingwang's favor quickly.

He only thought that he was now distracted, all because he had some debts and involvement with Jingwang. He believed that when these were paid off, he, Huo Wujiu, would still be the same Huo Wujiu, and wouldn't be tied up by an irrelevant person every day. It rankled him to no end, making him always wanting to kill someone.

——

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Chapter 65

The sun was rising high. Wei Kai was guarding the small clay stove, watching the medicine for Li Changning.

He fanned the fire with a fan, and glanced at the bed from time to time, watching as silver needles were gradually inserted into his General's legs, one by one, faintly glowing in the daylight.

He felt a bit creeped out, looking at them from a distance.

What would it feel like to have so many needles stuck in your body? The mere imagination of these things greeting his body made Wei Kai's spine tingle.

However, he had always had a blind confidence in his General, as if believing in a God.

From the time he had followed their General, what could the General not do well? What hurdle could their General not overcome?

None.

Even their capture this time after crossing the river was because of problems in the army of the Northern Liang, not because of their General.

Reminded of this, Wei Kai's mood was a bit heavy.

Wu Qianfan.

Wei Kai and Wu Qianfan were formerly the old Marquis's men. After the Marquis was killed in battle, the two of them followed the General and could be considered the General's right-hand men.

Others were stupid, but Wu Qianfan was much smarter than him. Wu Qianfan had always performed more appropriately on the things entrusted to them.

Because of this, he followed the General's side when they crossed the river this time, while the subsequent hundreds of thousands of troops were entrusted to Wu Qianfan. According to their plan, they would lead their troops to cross the river overnight and lay in ambush outside the Southern Jing city. After which, Wu Qianfan would lead the army. After the large force crossed the river, the General would command the attack.

However, the Southern Jing had somehow armed in defense in advance, and trapped them south of the river. And they hadn't heard a word from Wu Qianfan, who should have led his troops to follow them.

Did something go wrong?

Wei Kai and Wu Qianfan were both orphans adopted by the old marquis in Yangguan. They grew up together, so he had no doubt about Wu Qianfan's character. As he fought to stay alive and led the few remaining troops around to gather information, he also spied on information from the Northern Liang all the time.

Perhaps they encountered an ambush when crossing the river. Or did a turbulence occur in the river, sweeping them into some sort of situation?

But there was no news at all.

Wei Kai gradually got lost in thought while watching over the medicine stove until a crisp voice broke the silence in the room.

"His Highness Jingwang is here," a servant girl came in to report.

Wei Kai was startled, and he quickly looked at Li Changning. Then he found that Li Changning had almost finished inserting the needles, and was now also looking at him.

Li Changning waved his hand at him.

Wei Kai hurriedly looked in the direction he indicated, and saw that the medicinal soup on the stove had started to boil.

He hurriedly brought the medicinal soup from the stove.

While they were busy, footsteps arriving at the door sounded. They both looked up and found Jingwang, who was gracefully wrapped in a dark cloak, walking straight into the room.

Wei Kai followed Li Changning and bowed to him.

But before they could kneel down, Jingwang waved his hand slightly and said, “Get up. Get on with what you’re doing. I have nothing better to do, so I just came to take a look.”

Wei Kai sneaked a peek at him.

He watched as Jingwang walked to the bedside. He only took a glance at their General’s legs, and then quickly withdrew his gaze. With a short glance, Wei Kai surmised that Jingwang was scared by the silver needles on their General’s legs, so much so that he didn’t dare to look at them directly.

Wei Kai sneered inwardly.

Hmph, these Southern Jing bigwigs were always like him, extremely ruthless but cowardly. They didn’t even know how many people they had harmed, but in reality, they couldn’t even look at a shed of blood.

His kind was the most annoying paper tiger.

How could he compare to our General? He’s hurt and got needles stuck in his legs, but his expression remains unchanged, and he keeps his eyes closed…

Um? General?

Wei Kai inwardly lauded, but then his eyes accidentally fell on the General’s face.

The General, who had been quietly closing his eyes, opened his eyes at some point. Although his face was hidden under the curtains, Wei Kai happened to be standing in the corner and could see him through the gap in the curtains.

He saw through the heavy brocade curtains that their General was actually looking at Jingwang.

Wei Kai had never known that his ice-cold and arrogant black eyes could actually…surprisingly could show such a look.

It was as if he had been looking forward to meeting Jingwang, but at the same time, wanted to conceal this emotion. Although he was expressionless, Wei Kai vaguely felt that he seemed a little happy. However, it was mixed with what felt like a trace of resentment, with a thousand twists and turns that made his eyes particularly deep.

Wei Kai froze in place.

At that moment, he heard Li Changning's voice.

"Silly boy, what has got you dazed?"

Only after receiving Li Changning's lecture did Wei Kai come back to his senses. He realized that Li Changning had walked up to him at some point and carried the pot of medicine away.

Li Changning walked away with a smile and explained to Jiang Suizhou, "This medicine is meant to nurse Madam's health. Madam stays in his room all day, so his body is more or less weak. If he doesn't take medicine, I'm afraid he can't withstand this level of acupuncture…"

Wei Kai stood in place, his gaze drifting to their General's face again.

This time, the General was looking at him.

Those obsidian-like eyes were cold and hard, as if the deep hundred twists and turns he saw just now were all his illusion.

With just one glance, it froze Wei Kai awake.

Illusion, he said to himself.

It must have been an illusion.

What deeper meaning could there be when their General looked at Jingwang?

Even if there was, it would be a deep meaning of wanting to kill him in one shot afterwards.

The author has something to say.

Wei Kai used the passive skill: The Eye of a Straight Guy Want to read more chapters and support us? Please consider becoming a patron to read up to 24 chapters in advance!

Chapter 66

Jiang Suizhou was indeed disconcerted by the silver needles on Huo Wujiu's leg.

Before transmigrating, he was very healthy and hadn't even had a few IV drips before, let alone acupuncture. The injuries on Huo Wujiu's leg weren't healed, and after the needles were applied, they looked even more alarming.

With just one glance, Jiang Suizhou's eyes felt like they had been burned, and he hurriedly turned his gaze away.

How painful must this be, huh?

He felt as if he was in Huo Wujiu's shoes. Although he only took a glance, he felt like the needles were piercing his own body.

Beside him, Meng Qianshan helped him sit down on the couch beside Huo Wujiu. He then poured Jiang Suizhou a cup of hot tea and placed it in his hands.

However, Jiang Suizhou didn't spare him even a glance. His eyes only fell on Li Changning at the side of the bed.

He watched as Li Changning waited quietly at the bedside for a moment, until all the sand in the hourglass on his medical kit fell. Only then did he step forward and skillfully but quickly remove the needles on Huo Wujiu's legs.

After he wiped all the needles clean and stored them back into his medical kit, Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth and asked, "Is it over?"

Li Changning nodded and said, “I just need to serve Madam with the medicine, and then everything’s done.”

When Jiang Suizhou heard that, he asked, “Hmm. What medicine?”

Li Changning smiled and said, “They are for nourishing the body. Madam hasn’t been active these days, so I’m worried that he won’t be able to withstand the acupuncture. That’s why I need to use some herbs to nourish his qi and blood.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded and did not ask any further.

Li Changning turned around and ordered his disciple to take the medicine, but he didn’t know what his disciple was thinking. His disciple remained unresponsive even after he called him twice.

Li Changning hurriedly went forward, brought the medicine over, and gave it to Huo Wujiu on the bed.

Huo Wujiu sat up on the bed and received the medicine bowl.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but look at him twice more.

But just like when he lived in his room, Huo Wujiu didn’t lift his eyes. He ignored Jiang Suizhou as if he didn’t exist.

Jiang Suizhou felt rather relaxed and warmed by it, as if something that had been missing this morning had finally returned to its place.

The corner of Jiang Suizhou’s mouth couldn’t help but curl up, and even he didn’t notice it himself.

Seeing that Huo Wujiu had finished drinking the medicine on his own, Li Changning’s thoughts turned. He turned around and knelt down in front of Jiang Suizhou.

“Your Highness, the treatment for Madam is done for today,” he said. “If Your Highness has no other instructions, we’ll be taking our leave first.”

Li Changning was the most clear. His bowl of oral medicine worked quickly, and it would take but one incense stick at most to take effect.

This effect was naturally not only on the restoring of meridians, but also on the pain of flesh and bones.

Since he started his medical practice, he had treated several cases of the same patients. When the medicine took effect, the pain was always unbearable for them. He administered only half of the dose for the first few, but each grimaced hideously and tossed all around. Some were lucky enough to have fainted from the pain.

Jingwang, of course, mustn't witness this kind of scene, lest he'd be suspicious.

After all, what he told Jingwang was that he was only able to relieve the pain in Huo Wujiu's limbs. If Jiang Suizhou saw that the more he healed him, the more he was increasingly pained, it would be difficult to explain to him.

Therefore, he must be dismissed as soon as possible.

Li Changning had made plans. As soon as Jingwang let him go, he would immediately pretend to remember something and ask Jingwang to return to his room. He would then take his pulse and issue a prescription.

But then, he saw Jiang Suizhou, leaning against a throw pillow on the couch.

"Well," he said indifferently, "How is the treatment today?"

Li Changning was stunned.

Why didn't Jingwang play his cards according to common sense?!

He carefully raised his eyes to look at Jiang Suizhou, then saw him leisurely sitting there, short of lazy and relaxed. However, his face was unfathomable, as he quietly looked at him.

…He didn’t know if Jiang Suizhou really cared or if he was testing him.

Not knowing that Jiang Suizhou just wanted to stay in the room a little longer, Li Changning didn’t dare to slack off in the slightest. He deliberated his wording, and carefully but quickly reported to Jiang Suizhou.

He reported in a roundabout way, but watertight and very concise. Even if Jingwang had suspicions, he couldn’t possibly grasp at any clues.

After finishing his report, Li Changning lowered his head and counted the seconds secretly while begging Jingwang in his heart to leave quickly.

Then he saw Jingwang on the couch raise his hand.

Li Changning was prepped to go. He was just waiting for this master to swing his hand, so he could slip away, and while at it, fool this master away, too…

But Jiang Suizhou only picked up the cup of tea on the table and took a sip.

What was more, he went on to ask more questions.

From how long the medicine would take effect, to whether the acupuncture had side effects, and even what acupuncture points to pierce; he just had to ask.

Li Changning murmured to himself, It’s over.

He answered Jiang Suizhou’s questions with trepidation while counting the time.

An incense stick burned very fast, and the time was almost there.

Li Changning’s heart jumped to his throat.

However, he watched an incense burning time pass, but the bed remained peaceful. The time passed little by little, but except for the sound of the two of them talking, no other movement was heard in the room at all.

Gradually, Li Changning relaxed.

Sure enough, this General Huo couldn’t be judged by the standards of ordinary people.

Since he had the stamina, then there was no need to cover up.

So, Li Changning talked to Jiang Suizhou with confidence, answering his questions glibly and replying quite freely.

However, he didn’t notice that Jiang Suizhou, who was sitting on the couch, was a little distracted.

His eyes drifted towards the bed from time to time.

Huo Wujiu indeed usually ignored him, but not as bad as today. He just laid there, as if there was no one else there but himself.

Since the showdown that day, Huo Wujiu seemed to have always shown such an attitude toward him. Jiang Suizhou didn’t know where he had misspoken.

How about…finding an excuse to take care of him a few times?

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Chapter 67

Jiang Suizhou was talking to Li Changning casually, but he couldn’t help thinking about Huo Wujiu on the bed.

A few moments later, he made up his mind.

I’m already here. What else is there to be ashamed of?

With this in mind, he raised his hand, stopping Li Changning from speaking.

Li Changning was describing to Jiang Suizhou what blood vessels his acupuncture method could penetrate and what effects it would have, when he was interrupted. He looked up at Jiang Suizhou.

He saw Jingwang stand up and walk over to the bed.

“How are you? Do you feel better?” He heard Jingwang ask.

Li Changning couldn’t tell if it was an illusion, but he felt that when Jingwang spoke to General Huo, his tone was a little milder than just now.

Then he heard General Huo on the bed giving a hum. His voice was a little mute, but it sounded smooth.

At this turn, Jingwang must definitely not see what kind of pain the General was enduring at this time.

Sure enough, Jingwang followed with a response.

Li Changning heaved a sigh of relief.

But at that moment, he saw Jingwang's back stiffen.

Immediately after that, he heard Jingwang's voice, like falling into an ice cellar.

"Why is his face so pale?"

——

It wasn't until Jiang Suizhou walked closer that he discovered how abnormally white Huo Wujiu's lips were. The latter's forehead was covered with a layer of fine sweat. Huo Wujiu's eyes were shut at the moment, and only when he walked in did he realise it as an afterthought, struggling to open his eyes to look at him, still with that expressionless look.

But Jiang Suizhou could see at a glance that he was holding out despite the pain.

Jiang Suizhou was so startled that he hastily dragged Li Changning over. Li Changning stepped forward trembling, checked Huo Wujiu's pulse and said, "Your Highness, there will be some pain after the acupuncture. This is normal."

Jiang Suizhou didn't believe a word of it.

"Normal?" He questioned in a cold voice. "Then why didn't you tell me just now?"

What was more, he didn't believe that this was only a 'little pain'. Huo Wujiu was a person who could endure a lot. If he was sweating from the pain, it was by no means a pain that ordinary people could withstand.

Before Li Changning could reply, he stepped forward, grabbed Li Changning's lapel, and threatened in between gritted his teeth, "If something happens to him, this Prince will kill you."

Jingwang was weak, and his hands had little strength. But facing that pair of cold frightening eyes, Li Changning still couldn't help but shiver.

Doesn't this Jingwang detest the General? Why does he look like he really will kill for the General…

He shivered and said, "Your Highness, don't be angry! It will indeed be painful when the needles are first applied to unblock the meridians, but after a period of treatment, the pain will be greatly relieved…"

But Jiang Suizhou asked again, "How long will this last?"

Li Changning replied, "About a month…"

Jiang Suizhou flung him away and laughed coldly: "So you're going to torment him for a month in a row? Your acupuncture is only to relieve the pain, but now it not only can't relieve it, it even worsens it. Yet, you still dare to swindle this Prince with such words?"

Li Changning trembled, unable to speak, and scrambled to find words in his head to deal with the situation.

Just then, a hoarse voice rang out from the bed.

"It doesn't matter."

It was Huo Wujiu's voice.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and saw Huo Wujiu supporting himself to sit up on the bed.

"That's how I'm supposed to be treated. No need to make things difficult for him," Huo Wujiu added.

Li Changning thought he was finished.

He was worried about arousing suspicion of Jingwang. He just explained it himself moments ago, and now even the General was helping him. This was probably only adding fuel to the fire…

Li Changning's legs went limp.

He didn’t dare to raise his eyes to look at Jingwang and only waited for him to hit the roof.

Instead, he heard a slow, deep breath.

“Get lost,” Jingwang said, “If after one month, it doesn’t match what you said, this Prince wants your head.”

Li Changning knelt down on the ground, his face full of disbelief.

Er…the exposure’s just like that?

——

Li Changning took Wei Kai and fled. In a blink, the room fell into silence, leaving only Jiang Suizhou, who was standing by the bed, and Huo Wujiu, facing each other.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked at him.

Jingwang seemed truly enraged just now, but at this time, his cold and ferocious appearance was completely gone. He stood in front of the bed against the light, and although his expression was still cold, Huo Wujiu captured traces of helplessness in his eyes.

Those eyes, one after another, glanced at his legs.

For some reason, the irritation that had been pent up in Huo Wujiu’s heart for a few days gradually dissipated at this point, turning into some compromise-like helplessness.

…No wonder I thought wrongly. Is this Jingwang confused about how to treat his collaborators and someone he admires? Obviously, he got involved with me because of his own interests. However, is it necessary to feel so genuine? It made him feel as if his anger for his supposed bullying was his care for him.

After a pause, Huo Wujiu spoke indifferently, “Do you need anything else?”

Standing at the side of the bed, Jiang Suizhou came back to his senses with an, “Oh,” then said, “This Prince…I just came to see if you’re okay.”

“I’m fine,” Huo Wujiu’s reply was dry and sharp.

Jingwang moved, as if subconsciously leaving obediently, but his feet stopped in the same place.

After a pause, he lowered his eyes and looked arrogantly at Huo Wujiu, saying in a cold voice, “Do you think you’ll be fine if you say you’re fine? That day when it rained, you also said you were fine, but what happened?”

After saying that, he didn’t wait for Huo Wujiu’s response, then he looked sideways at Meng Qianshan who wasn’t far away.

Meng Qianshan understood and hurriedly brought a chair for him and placed it by the bed.

Jiang Suizhou sat down on that chair with an unrelenting look on his face.

“This Prince will watch over you,” he said.

Huo Wujiu glanced at him. “As you wish,” he said indifferently.

Jingwang no longer spoke, but took the booklet handed to him by Meng Qianshan and sat straight where he was, reading it.

Huo Wujiu’s gaze faltered, and then he withdrew his eyes.

There was no question that Jiang Suizhou was unlikeable and even extremely annoying, but he brought him doses of sweetness from nowhere. Huo Wujiu felt annoyed with the mere thought of Jiang Suizhou, but after seeing him, he couldn’t control the corners of his mouth.

It was very strange.

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Chapter 68

Although Jiang Suizhou looked like he was reading a book, his eyes were sneaking peeks at Huo Wujiu.

He knew that Huo Wujiu was the kind of man who wouldn't say anything even if he was dying of pain, so Jiang Suizhou would probably have to wait a lifetime for Huo Wujiu to take the initiative to say he was hurt.

However, Jiang Suizhou also knew that even if Huo Wujiu was in severe pain, he was helpless and could do nothing but nailbite.

But he just couldn't help it. He wanted to know Wujiu's condition at all times.

Jiang Suizhou saw Huo Wujiu sitting on the bed, as silent as a grave. His eyes were closed, as if he were refreshing his spirit by closing his eyes.

However, his lips were white; his face was unsightly, and his eyebrows were very tight.

Jiang Suizhou also felt inexplicably uncomfortable.

He seemed to be particularly reluctant to see others endure pain by themselves.

A moment later, Jiang Suizhou hesitated before speaking with uncertainty, "Would you like to read a book?"

Huo Wujiu opened his eyes and looked at him.

He heard Jiang Suizhou seriously say, "It's more or less a distraction."

He was partly sincere. He didn’t like to watch TV and play video games since he was a child, and had always felt that the noise was bothersome. His family was in chaos, and there were so many messy things that he loved to hide in his study. Although they were rather obscure books read by adults, they could make him concentrate on them and unconsciously kill time.

However, Huo Wujiu was sizing him up for a moment, without speaking.

Huo Wujiu didn’t know Jiang Suizhou’s experiences and thoughts. He only knew that he would get a headache from reading since childhood, and that hadn’t changed now.

For him, what was even more cruel was that he was now unable to move and could only read books to pass his days, like a bandit being forced to recite scriptures.

However, when he heard Jiang Suizhou’s proposal, he didn’t feel bothered.

Somehow, not even when Jiang Suizhou looked at him; he was expressionless, but looked like a gentleman.

Huo Wujiu had hated gentlemen since he was a child.

However, Jiang Suizhou’s appearance looked surprisingly pleasing to the eye, as if he wasn’t be a high and mighty Prince, flaunting his powers, but a teacher covered in ink.

If he had been a teacher…

He probably wouldn’t be the kind who would hold a ruler and force his students to read. The moment he took a seat and looked at people quietly, people would have an impulse to listen to him.

Huo Wujiu didn’t recover his senses for a while.

Jiang Suizhou asked in confusion, “Huo Wujiu?”

When Huo Wujiu returned to his senses, Jiang Suizhou said, “Shall I ask Meng Qianshan to bring you a copy?”

Huo Wujiu paused, feeling that he had been bewitched just now.

Would he read or not? He was usually forced to suffer from this kind of mental torture purely because he had nothing to do. He was numb with pain now. It was hard for him to speak, so he'd better not make himself unhappy.

"No need," Huo Wujiu said faintly, and then closed his eyes again.

He had constantly sustained injuries, big and small. Every time the pain was unbearable, he would recite the spiritual calming mantra that his martial arts master had taught to him, and it was quite effective. He had been chanting just that. Although it didn't really alleviate anything, it could purge the disquiet in his heart and improve his endurance to some extent.

Unbeknownst to him, Jiang Suizhou got the wrong idea.

He only thought that Huo Wujiu's momentary daze was due to the pain in his legs. On second thought, he had to endure both severe pain and presumably all the flowers in front of him, so he had even less energy to spare on reading a book quietly.

An extremely immature impulse suddenly sprouted inside Jiang Suizhou's heart.

He blurted out, "How about…how about I read to you?"

Only after saying this did he suddenly come back to his senses.

What am I doing!

Am I trying to read a story to the War God Huo?!

Jiang Suizhou was shocked by this realization. He looked at Huo Wujiu somewhat hastily, waiting for the latter to say something in refusal so that he could take the opportunity to retract what he had just offered.

But he saw Huo Wujiu reopen his eyes and look at him quietly.

Huo Wujiu said nothing.

Jiang Suizhou stared at him for a moment and spoke somewhat stutteringly.

“Th-Then, shall I start?”

——

Jiang Suizhou was holding a travelogue in his hand.

He had read a lot of ancient official history books. On the contrary, most of these folklores were lost in later generations, and many were compiled and distorted, mixed with unofficial history. So after transmigrating, Jiang Suizhou got interested in these ‘leisure books’. In addition to reading official documents and secret reports sent by his staff, he would read these books to kill time.

He read to Huo Wujiu from where he had left off last time.

Fortunately, he was a teacher by nature. Except for feeling squirmy at first, he gradually immersed himself in what he was reading.

His voice was gentle and soothing. Perhaps it was because his tone had a great impact on his voice, so when he was reading the book, Jiang Suizhou’s voice sounded seemingly clean, making the surrounding atmosphere rather serene.

Meng Qianshan stood nearby with bated breath, tsking deep inside.

He said to himself, *My master is really good at chasing someone.*

Look-look, he’s reading to him. What ordinary person can think of this kind of method? Who else with his identity can do this?

I believe that even if Madam Huo has a heart made of iron, it would be melted by this.

With this in mind, Meng Qianshan couldn’t help but look at Madam Huo.

However, he found that Madam Huo was just sitting on the bed with eyes closed and without saying a word. His face was still white, but his frown

seemed to have disappeared…

I told you so! I guess it won't be long before I can help Madam Huo to move back into His Highness's room once more!

Meng Qianshan thought this way and could not help but cheer up.

Just then, Madam Huo opened his eyes.

A pair of thick black but transparent eyes coldly looked at him.

Then, Meng Qianshan witnessed as Madam Huo faintly glanced at his master, and after seeing that he was absorbed in reading and not paying attention to his surroundings, he raised his eyes to him again.

Those eyes appeared a few drops colder, and his brow was furrowed with a chill.

Even someone as dull as Meng Qianshan understood Huo Wujiu's point.

That master thought he was in the way and wanted him to get out.

Meng Qianshan was entirely sensible. He bowed silently to this master and hurriedly slipped out.

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Chapter 69

Huo Wujiu watched Meng Qianshan run away with his cold eyes on the bed, before he slowly withdrew his gaze and quietly glanced over at Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou was so engrossed that he didn’t notice Huo Wujiu’s gaze.

His voice wasn’t loud. His reading was akin to talking to people, gentle and clear, completely different from usual.

Huo Wujiu’s breath unknowingly calmed down.

He didn’t expect that a leisure book, read by Jiang Suizhou, would be much more useful than the spiritual calming mantra.

The content of the travelogue was actually not interesting. A literary man with nothing better to do than to run around and play, wrote some leisure books to record his insights.

But Jiang Suizhou seemed to be quite interested in it. Even he himself did not notice how vivid his eyes were when he was reading.

The corners of his lips were also curled up, looking quite delighted.

Huo Wujiu’s gaze paused for a moment. Then, he turned away and slowly closed his eyes.

He hated reading books, not only because he was too lazy to read the words, but also because he was disinterested in the contents of those written, all together.

But at this time, when he closed his eyes, the clear voice seemed to have become a flowing and clear river, flowing through Bashu and Huguang recorded by the literati, and sparkling under the thousands of miles of sunshine.

He seemed fond of those things.

For some reason, it also gave Huo Wujiu an impulse.

He wanted to make those things that Jiang Suizhou liked all belong to him.

He was like a secular person who had finally been canonised and had finally become a believer of God and Buddha.

This gave him the urge to kneel before the statue of God, wanting to offer all the wealth and treasures that belonged to him and those that didn't belong to him, all together to God.

——

Jiang Suizhou stayed in the room until nightfall.

He naturally had dinner with Huo Wujiu before getting up to leave.

Seeing that he and Huo Wujiu were getting along quite well, Meng Qianshan stepped forward astutely and asked with a smile, "Will Your Highness still come tomorrow?"

Jiang Suizhou stopped in his tracks and couldn't help but look at Huo Wujiu.

He actually wanted to come. These days, he was pretending to be sick and resting at home, so he didn't have to go anywhere. Hence, he was very idle. Huo Wujiu had just started treating his legs this while, and according to that doctor, the pain he suffered today would persist for another month.

Jiang Suizhou was a little uneasy.

Perhaps because he was too afraid of death before, it made him develop the habit of putting Huo Wujiu first in everything. It made him a bit unable to change over for a while.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and met Jiang Suizhou's gaze.

"You don't need to ask for my opinion," Huo Wujiu stilled for a second and said somewhat awkwardly.

Meng Qianshan's face lit up with joy, and before Jiang Suizhou could speak, he smiled and exclaimed, "Oh! Then this servant will arrange for someone to pack up and bring all the books and official documents that Your Highness wants to read to Madam Huo!"

Jiang Suizhou glanced at him.

He saw Meng Qianshan smiling and saying, "Perfect! I also think that Madam Huo's light here is better than that of the Prince's study. It's only right for His Highness to bask more in the sun!"

This kid was so enthusiastic, but it saved Jiang Suizhou a lot of trouble.

He did not refute. And as a tacit acknowledgement, he hummed and got up to leave.

That night, a letter was delivered to Jiang Suizhou's room.

It was sent by Xu Du. The scouts he had arranged in Changle Square sent back news that the officials of the Ministry of Justice had mapped out the location and would be raiding the residence in the next two days.

As early as they made this plan, they knew that because Chen Ti had invited Huo Wujiu to the flower viewing banquet last time, he had quite a face in front of the Hou Zhu. Thus, he landed a cushy job these days and was right in the middle of work in Suzhou.

The only person in the house now was the woman he was keeping there. She was a woman from the brothel, so she most probably would get caught in front of the Hou Zhu in the next two days.

Jiang Suizhou finished reading the letter, pondered for a moment and smiled.

According to the historical records in his memory, although Chen Ti apparently flattered Pang Shao, he actually had some small selfish schemes. Pang Shao was greedy for money, and even his men couldn't escape his scavenging. Therefore, Chen Ti's house was unknown even to Pang Shao.

In that case, when the Ministry of Justice closed the net, that mansion, along with the woman from the brothel, would be the first to be counted on Jiang Suizhou's head.

Thereafter, the Hou Zhu would definitely investigate deeper. This case was also bound to be a huge trouble for him.

By then…they only had to wait for them to use their own spear and attack their own shield.

Jiang Suizhou felt that there was a good show waiting for him to see. His mood lifted, and even after putting the letter away properly, his expression remained pleasant.

Meng Qianshan, who peeked at him, tsked inwardly.

Normally, when the Prince was dealing with official business, had there ever been a moment where he was so carefree and even smiled at a secret letter?

What could be funny when the secret letter was full of important matters?

The Prince must have been distracted while reading the letter and thought of Madam Huo.

With this belief, Meng Qianshan sneaked a peek at Jiang Suizhou as he withdrew from his bedroom and smirked.

His smirk was rather ambiguous.

The author has something to say:

Jiang Suizhou: What are you smiling at?

Meng Qianshan: I thought of something happy 😀

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Chapter 70

Within two days, the palace had news.

The matter of the Ministry of Rite embezzling the Emperor’s birthday banquet funds caused an uproar. Two days prior, the Ministry of Justice suddenly discovered a clue about the whereabouts of the embezzled money. Indeed, it was a mansion purchased by an official from the palace.

His Majesty gave orders at once, sending people to seize the mansion.

The Ministry of Justice immediately sent personnel to set out. Because the operation was sudden, it was rather successful. Not only did they seize an astonishing amount of gold, silver and antiques from the mansion, they also found a prostitute kept there.

For some reason, after His Majesty learned of this matter, he was not concerned about how much money the mansion had hidden. Instead, he was extremely interested in that woman, and immediately sent someone to investigate the master of the mansion, along with the background of this woman.

But unexpectedly, the Ministry of Justice official discovered that the mansion was under the woman’s name. This woman was actually redeemed by the Ministry of Rites’ Chen Ti.

And Chen Ti was the very first to find the clue that day and reported to the higher officials about Ji You’s corruption.

This result was unexpected to the palace’s higher and lower positions.

Somehow, the Emperor was extremely dissatisfied with the outcome, and lashed at the Ministry of Justice official. Afterward, he gave orders to

severely punish Chen Ti, not merciful in the least.

Buying out a woman from the brothel was not considered a crime, so Chen Ti couldn't really be convicted. However, it could be verified that this mansion, as well as the residence's gold and silver money, were all Chen Ti's possession.

These years, very few officials in Southern Jing were incorrupt. The amount of this embezzlement was not considered much to them, but the Jing Dynasty's laws and decrees had written rules which stated that once an official was captured, the penalty naturally had to be dealt out according to the laws and decrees.

Few days had passed before Chen Ti was convicted, and thus, the wind sighed and the crane called* on the palace's officials for a period of time.

*wind sighing and crane calling (idiom) – extremely jittery and scared

——

The peach blossoms in Pang residence bloomed just in time, buoyantly filling the garden with blossoms.

A neat and quietly elegant stretch of fresh greenery could be seen in Pang Shao's courtyard.

Those were Huizhou and Shexian County's green plum blossoms. Because the previous emperor was fond of it, ever since decades ago, it would be delivered to Jing's imperial harem every year.

Because the water and land were different, it was difficult to transport, so every year, no more than a hundred plants would be sent to the palace. This year, even outside Hou Zhu's palace, only a few were planted. But in Pang Shao's courtyard, the whole courtyard had been planted like cloud and mist*.

*cloud and mist (metaphor) – obscured/packed/full

Tea was boiling on the stove in front of Pang Shao. An official was respectfully sitting on his right-hand seat. Another knelt before him, trembling all over, not daring to lift his head.

It was the Ministry of Justice official who went to investigate Jiang Suizhou's residence the other day.

Pang Shao lifted open the teapot and leisurely took a look inside. Among the dense steam of smoke, he slowly asked, "What did Jingwang tell you?"

The official trembled and cried, "Please investigate, Chief Minister! This humble one enquired His Highness Jingwang as instructed. His Highness Jingwang's statements are all recorded in the book, this humble one by no means has lied!

Pang Shao smiled faintly.

"Then, what of that residence?" he asked.

The official said, "It's what Jingwang Manor's youngest concubine said!"

Pang Shao's movement paused, and he covered the lid of the teapot back.

"He told you?" Pang Shao's expression was rather odd.

The official shook his head. "That's not it! This official had eavesdropped…That concubine was complaining with his maid, said His Highness Jingwang keeps a mistress outside, and also bought a residence in Changle Square for that mistress…This official thought, this information was significant, and had to let His Majesty know, this is…!"

His frightened voice trembled.

Pang Shao smiled lightly. "What is Zhang-*daren* nervous of? I am only asking," he said.

The official trembled to the point of not being able to speak.

Pang Shao said with a faint smile, “Alright, my tea is almost done, I also won’t keep Zhang-*daren* here anymore. Please, go back.”

The flustered official got up from the ground.

He wanted to bow and express his gratitude, yet he heard Pang Shao open his mouth again. “But, Zhang-*daren*.”

The official hurriedly answered, “Chief Minister?”

He watched as Pang Shao picked up the teapot from the small clay stove. The flame from the stove jumped once in a while, glowing with a hot, red light.

“See, if a person makes a mistake, they must pay the price.” Pang Shao did not lift his eyes, pouring the tea as he spoke.

“This price, if you don’t take the initiative yourself, you can’t blame others for doubling it.”

When he finished speaking, he put down the teapot, and lifted his eyes to look at that official with a smile that was not a smile.

He saw the official dumbstruck, then saw him repeatedly bowing with his hands clasped in front, saying, “Many thanks, Chief Minister! Many thanks, Chief Minister!”

Pang Shao lifted a teacup with one hand, while he waved languidly with another hand.

The official retreated down.

Pang Shao blew and drank the hot tea. He lightly smiled and commended, “The Dragon Well tea from Jiangnan indeed is clearer than Ye City’s.”

Saying this, he picked up the teapot and said to the official on the side, “Do you want to have a taste, too?”

That official was the official responsible for searching and sorting the embezzlement of Chen Ti's residence.

He dared not let Pang Shao pour him tea, so he hurriedly took the teapot with both hands, and also put out the stove on behalf of Pang Shao.

"Chief Minister, why did you let him go just like that?" the official asked.

Pang Shao hmmed.

"What's the use of keeping him? It wasn't his fault." Pang Shao lightly smiled, his expression lukewarm and generous.

But the official understood what Pang Shao meant.

There were a couple of people in Pang's faction who had previously provoked Pang Shao. Pang Shao had found their vulnerable points, spared their lives, and brought them into the adherents. These people had no choice but to put double effort into slaving for Pang Shao, as well as giving more beneficial results.

To Pang Shao, keeping him was more profitable than killing him.

The official laughed upon hearing his response. Following Pang Shao's words, he commended, "Chief Minister is always generous and kind, and has great wisdom and knowledge."

Pang Shao only lightly smiled.

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Chapter 71

Soon after, he heard the official follow up with a question. “What about… Chen-*daren*?”

Pang Shao looked at him.

The official said indignantly, “Jingwang must have bore a grudge against Chen-*daren*, so he pulled this dirty trick! Chief Minister, we must not let Jingwang have his way, must we?”

But Pang Shao shook his head and sighed, lifting his eyes to watch the abundant green plum blossoms outside the window.

“His Majesty already issued an imperial edict, how could I dare to disobey?”

He lightly sighed, as though having seen a dead bird that flew past, casually uttering.

“What a shame for Chen Ti, that child.”

The official on the side shut his mouth immediately, losing his bravado to talk again.

Today, who honored their words in the palace? Even when one closed their eyes, they would know. It wasn’t His Majesty, but rather, Pang-*daren*.

There was no imperial edict that Pang-*daren* could not change; Pang-*daren* merely did not want to change it.

This official came here originally because of Chen Ti’s case. He probed with a few words, and soon vaguely understood.

Pang Shao had never cared about Chen Ti, and only regarded him as a dog that he could order about as he wished. These two times, Chen Ti had acted on his own, crossing him to curry favor with His Majesty, which had rubbed Pang Shao's sore spot. Such large amounts of hidden gold and silver, which Pang Shao was oblivious of, were also discovered. So even if the Emperor did not raise his hand to handle the matter, Pang-*daren* would also not spare his life.

The official sighed in his heart.

It was Chen Ti who was blinded by greed and was not sensible.

Nowadays in the palace, whose life was not in the hands of Pang-*daren*? Doing little acts behind his back, would there be any good end?

Then, this made it clear what the official ought to do.

Naturally, it would be before Chen Ti's deathbed that he would be trampled on, in exchange of Pang Shao's joy. And in the process of delivering the gold, silver and antiques into the exchequer, he would think of a way to take 20-30% and send it to the residence of Pang-*daren*.

The official inwardly planned.

He then heard Pang Shao suddenly give out a light, rueful sigh.

"I just didn't expect, the loser dog confined in the cage is still figuring out how to bite people."

The official did not understand.

Pang Shao also did not explain. He lowered his eyes and drank his tea, concealing the stern countenance in his eyes.

"Truly interesting."

———

Although Jiang Suizhou was not beside Pang Shao, he was aware that Pang Shao resented him a lot.

Although Chen Ti was not a high-ranked official, who in the palace didn't know that he was Pang Shao's distant relative, that he was one of Pang Shao's people? Even though Pang Shao did not place much importance in him, he himself had his own selfish calculations. But the penalized Chen Ti just had to publicly slap Pang Shao in the face.

It was a blunt, cold knife that brought dishonor.

However, this did not stop the joy in Jiang Suizhou's heart.

He had long seen Chen Ti as an eyesore. This time, since Ji You's rescue went smoothly and Chen Ti was also disposed of, to him, it was a successful kill of two birds with one stone.

As for why Pang Shao resented him so much…

Anyway, even if Jiang Suizhou didn't do anything, Pang Shao would still not let him off. It would be better to fight with him, and not let him win.

Ever since receiving the news, Jiang Suizhou was filled with exuberance. He sat down in front of Huo Wujiu's bed, and immediately felt Huo Wujiu's eyes on him.

"How are you today?" Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu's complexion was still ghastly, but his expression was composed. His hands were extremely pale*, but he still had miniscule energy left to glance at Jiang Suizhou several times.

*the literal translation from Chinese is "the veins on the back of his hands were vivid", but it's to show that he's pale and unwell, so I translated it to "his hands were extremely pale"

Jiang Suizhou noticed his scrutinizing, and his twinkling eyes stared at Huo Wujiu, waiting expectantly for him to open his mouth and ask.

After all, looking at this whole world now, there were few people who could talk with him, and there were fewer people whom he could share his joy with.

Huo Wujiu, however, counted as one of them.

But he saw Huo Wujiu pause, withdraw his gaze and indifferently say, “Doing good.”

Indeed, he did not say anything else.

Jiang Suizhou felt his breath stuck in his throat, not going up or down. It was truly awkward.

For a moment, he only stared blankly.

Why didn’t he ask! Huo Wujiu, why didn’t he ask!

Though unaware, Huo Wujiu, who squinted a glance at him, silently clamped his lips in agony at the bottom of his heart.

This Jingwang was already dying with “I have something to tell you” etched on his face, and was only waiting for him to ask, but instead, he chose to tease him.

Huo Wujiu’s expression was indifferent, as though not at all realizing Jiang Suizhou’s abnormality.

Then, he saw Jiang Suizhou taking the book Meng Qianshan brought. But over and over, he kept biting his tongue, so he neither looked nor flipped the book.

Those glossy black eyes repeatedly shot a glance at Huo Wujiu several times.

Teasing him actually made him soft.

Huo Wujiu paused, and finally asked, “What is it?”

Sure enough, those eyes brightened at once.

Huo Wujiu only felt that those legs that were hurting so much that it made him want to kill someone, had gotten far away from him.

He saw Jingwang looking solemn and unyieldingly putting on an indifference. But that ostentatious expression couldn't be concealed, quite like a cutesy cat.

"This Prince saved Ji You," he said.

Huo Wujiu nodded. "It's a good thing."

Then, he heard Jiang Suizhou followed with, "Chen Ti was beheaded."

Huo Wujiu hmmed and pondered for a moment, connecting these two matters together. "Scapegoat?"

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

He merely settled his gaze at Huo Wujiu. This look was the same as waiting to be praised. Huo Wujiu paused, and could not bear but to compliment, "It's a brilliant scheme."

But he heard Jiang Suizhou repeat, "It's Chen Ti."

Huo Wujiu was quite puzzled for a while. "What about him?"

He saw Jingwang staring at him, his satisfied expression natural. He blurted out, "Chen Ti, did you forget? The one who gave you the flower banquet invitation, who wanted to humiliate you, that one."

With this said, Jiang Suizhou smiled faintly. "This Prince brought disaster on his head."

Huo Wujiu was dazed for a time.

He just realized; this Jingwang was this happy to tell him about this matter, not because he had saved the life of the Minister of Rites, but instead

because…

Jiang Suizhou wanted to tell Huo Wujiu, he had taken revenge for him.

The author has something to say:

Huo Wujiu: Thanks for inviting me. Although I know he doesn’t like me, my heartbeat still starts going insane.

Wei Kai: He doesn’t love you.

Huo Wujiu: I know, hehe.

Wei Kai: ?

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Chapter 72

However, Jiang Suizhou's joy didn't last for long.

After Chen Ti was convicted, because Qi Min refused to let him off, he repeatedly submitted written statements to the top, taking great pains to provoke Hou Zhu. Soon after, several members related to Chen Ti in the Ministry of Rites were convicted. Although the charges were not as serious as Chen Ti's, they were more or less demoted.

But Jiang Suizhou did not expect for Ji You to also be among those ranks.

This case originally stopped at this point, and in no way was it related to him, but after two days of him being released from prison, he was demoted under the jurisdiction of lax charges, and was transferred to Huizhou.

Huizhou wasn't very far, nor was it as remote as Lingnan, but at Ji You's age, being demoted to outside the capital was equivalent to ending his career as an official.

Ji You didn't have a criminal charge, yet Pang Shao still tried every means to make things difficult for him, thus thinking of this idea. When he thought about it, Jiang Suizhou knew Pang Shao was using Ji You to fight with himself, to give him a warning.

Pang Shao was telling him, while under Pang Shao's leadership, even if the rescue of someone was successful, it wouldn't come to a good end.

Jiang Suizhou felt his breath stuck in his chest.

For two consecutive days, he didn't look for Huo Wujiu. In his study, he found some of the original owner's hidden rare books, along with some

silver notes for travel, and had Meng Qianshan deliver them to Ji You's residence.

Meng Qianshan soon returned.

Ji You accepted those books, but returned the silver notes.

Meng Qianshan gave the silver notes back to Jiang Suizhou, saying, "Your Highness, Ji-*daren* said his traveling expenses are sufficient, so you have no need to spend."

With this said, he fished out a thin letter from his arms and handed it to Jiang Suizhou. "Ji-*daren* also wrote a few words, and asked this humble slave to pass it on to Your Highness."

Jiang Suizhou opened the letter and saw eloquent, unrestrained writing on the paper.

"Thank you for your Highness' rescue, and I ask Your Highness not to blame yourself.

"Huizhou has lovely scenery, the plum blossoms are especially lavish, I have yearned to see it for a long time. If you think about it, if I leave a bit earlier, I can catch up before I wizen, and see Huizhou's green plums for myself. Wouldn't it be wonderful?"

Jiang Suizhou read until this point, and the corner of his mouth relaxed, before finally forming a very shallow curve.

In life, each one has their own preferences and pursuits. But Pang Shao imposed his preferences on others, thinking that career and wealth were the things everyone liked, which made him think that ruining Ji You's future prospects was the most appropriate punishment.

But he didn't know, his so-called punishment was nothing to Ji You. To Jiang Suizhou, this was luck in misfortune.

But…

Jiang Suizhou studied the letter for a moment, and put it away like it was a precious thing.

Although this demotion only tickled Ji You, and instead gave him the chance to enjoy the scenery to his heart's content, Pang Shao's animosity would never be forgotten by Jiang Suizhou.

He also must make it clear to Pang Shao.

But today, Pang Shao hoodwinked the court, and most of all, the Ministry of Personnel that was in charge of transferring and promoting officials, was practically grasped in Pang Shao's hands.

Even if he wanted to oppose Pang Shao, the fact was, it would be extremely difficult.

——

For two consecutive days, Huo Wujiu did not see Jiang Suizhou at all.

Every day, after taking his medicine, he could only wait in the room. Sometimes, he could see people going in and out of the courtyard from the window, but he couldn't go out.

He only felt, after taking the medicine these two days, the pain in his legs was a bit severe, so much so that his mood was poor. No matter how many times he thought of solutions to forget the pain, it did not work.

To him, these two days felt a little longer than usual.

Until the third day.

Just like the previous days, Li Changning gave him acupuncture and moxibustion. When he reached half of the pincushion, he suddenly heard Huo Wujiu ask, "Did the medicine change these two days?"

Li Changning was stunned. "It didn't!"

He raised his eyes to look at Huo Wujiu, and saw Huo Wujiu sitting there with a frown. Hearing his answer, Huo Wujiu raised his hand to rub the space between his brows and hmmed.

Li Changning hurriedly asked, “General, these two days, did you feel especially different?”

Huo Wujiu paused. “No, just asking.”

Li Changning gave a response, and continued pricking his needle.

Wei Kai turned his head to see Huo Wujiu with this expression, and knew something was wrong. He hurriedly moved to the bed and asked Huo Wujiu, “General, what happened?”

Huo Wujiu was silent for a moment. “These two days, what’s unusual happening in Jingwang Manor?”

Wei Kai pondered. “This subordinate has not heard any rumors, but this morning, when this subordinate followed Doctor Li to come here, that eunuch who’s always beside Jingwang told this subordinate to be a little careful.”

Huo Wujiu paused, and lifted his eyes to look at him. “What did he say?”

Wei Kai was dazed for a while. He felt that when the General heard this, he would speak a little faster.

He hastily said, “He didn’t say anything, he just said Jingwang is not very happy these two days, and asked this subordinate to not invite bad luck.”

Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze.

So something did happen.

He didn’t ask again. The two men also gave a meaningful glance and went to do their work. Only until both finished adding the needles, giving him all the medicine, and withdrawing, did Huo Wujiu lift his eyes to look outside the window, the space between his brows furrowed very tightly.

He was perfectly fine two days ago, what happened that made him so upset?

Huo Wujiu's heart was in turmoil, and he came up with a guess.

Could something have happened in the court? But these two days he didn't see Jingwang go out, let alone see anyone from the palace visiting Jingwang Manor.

Huo Wujiu's brows didn't loosen the whole day.

Luckily, when nightfall came, Jiang Suizhou showed up.

By now, Huo Wujiu had had his dinner and was sitting on the bed, randomly flipping a book distractedly. Jiang Suizhou sat down beside his bed and asked, "Are you well these two days?"

Huo Wujiu put down the book. He didn't answer his question, and instead said, "What happened?"

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but freeze for a moment.

He didn't expect this matter would reach Huo Wujiu's ears, and also didn't expect he would ask so naturally and as a matter of course.

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Chapter 73

Huo Wujiu saw him not speaking, and added, “I heard you’re not happy these two days.”

Jiang Suizhou’s heart inexplicably grew a peculiar warmth.

Ever since knowing Ji You was going to be demoted, he was extremely irritated that he could feel the others didn’t dare to provoke him. Because he was those people’s “master”, they didn’t dare provoke him, much less to be so bold as to ask what they shouldn’t ask.

He naturally was in no position to bring it up to people, and pouring his heart out was out of the question.

Although he usually wasn’t a sensitive person, such sentiments were always kept in his heart. There was not a person whom he could talk with, so he felt suppressed.

But he didn’t expect Huo Wujiu would ask, nor did he think that he could speak about this matter with Huo Wujiu.

He paused, before slowly explaining, “Ministry of Rites’ Ji-*daren* has been demoted. In a few days’ time, he’ll be sent to Huizhou.”

Huo Wujiu frowned. He asked, “Doesn’t it have nothing to do with him?”

Jiang Suizhou said, “He was convicted of lax charges. After Chen Ti was arrested, this matter was entirely handed over to the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Personnel. This Prince is unable to intervene.”

Huo Wujiu was silent for a moment and said with assertiveness, “That’s an order by someone below Pang Shao.”

Jiang Suizhou smiled, and slowly breathed out, “It’s Pang Shao. He has suffered from this Prince’s loss, so he wants to give trouble to this Prince. Ji-*daren* is only a troubled fish in a pond*.”

*殃及的池鱼 – taken from a literature: there’s a fish pond under a city gate. One day, the gate is on fire, so the people use the water from the pond to extinguish it. In the end, all of the fish in the pond die as their water is drained. This is to say, Ji You is only an innocent bystander.

Huo Wujiu said, “Since he joined the palace as an official, he has to be prepared for such risks. But it’s only a demotion, the place he’s going to is also not remote, and far away from the court. To him, it might be a good thing.”

But Jiang Suizhou shook his head.

“Others can think like this, but I can’t,” he said. “In any case, his disaster is all because of me, I can’t just stay idle.” After a pause, he softly sighed.

“That’s Pang Shao for you.”

Huo Wujiu didn’t speak for a while.

Jiang Suizhou also knew he was confined in the residence every day and couldn’t even walk. Naturally, he couldn’t do anything. He wasn’t hoping for Huo Wujiu to say anything. After he spilled it out, Jiang Suizhou’s heart felt a little more at ease. He picked up the book Meng Qianshan had placed next to him and said, “I didn’t come for two days, and quite forgot where I stopped reading.”

To change the subject, he proceeded to read the book for Huo Wujiu to listen to.

Huo Wujiu silently looked at him as he put forth a look as if nothing had happened, lowering his head as he flipped the book. His chest felt very stuffy.

…It wasn’t something he should bear, but because he was born in the emperor’s house, the pressure fell on his shoulders.

If he really was a cold-blooded, heartless bastard, then it would be fine. Only, he was an extremely tender-hearted person. Whether it was his business or not, he had to take all the responsibility on himself. In the end, even if he couldn’t stand it, he had to hold out.

He saw Jiang Suizhou flip to the page he stopped at last time and gently, quietly read aloud.

But before he could read two sentences, his voice abruptly ceased.

Jiang Suizhou raised his head in surprise, to see Huo Wujiu somehow came and snatched the book from his hands.

“Let me,” Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou revealed an astonished face.

He watched Huo Wujiu moving the lamp a little closer. Although his expression was indifferent and alienated, there was an inexplicably little awkwardness.

He clearly didn’t lift his eyes, much less look at him, but it was as though he was clumsily comforting him.

Jiang Suizhou was rendered speechless for a while, and only felt that his chest was rather hot. It was like the dreary feeling that silted up inside him, was slowly being burned away.

He fixed his gaze on Huo Wujiu, and didn’t speak for a while.

He watched Huo Wujiu lower his eyes, flipping open the book in his hands.

His indifferent look suddenly went rigid on his face.

After that, his eyebrows gradually scrunched up, and lifted his eyes to look at Jiang Suizhou.

“…The book you read a few days ago, it was this one?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou stared blankly for a moment. “Yes?”

Huo Wujiu’s gaze gingerly settled on the book.

It was different from the simple vernacular prose Jiang Suizhou read out these few days. This book’s content was difficult to understand, it was all rare words placed before Huo Wujiu, just like hieroglyphics. It only took two glances to make his brain ache.

Jiang Suizhou moved closer to take a look, and realized what happened at once.

This book was indeed written in extremely obscure classical Chinese. After all, the one who wrote the book was the previous dynasty’s renowned erudite scholar. All of the wordings and phrasings needed careful study. The spoken and written language of the ancients were, after all, completely different. These sentences couldn’t be read out, and naturally had to be translated first before it was able to be read.

Because Jiang Suizhou originally had this job, he could translate with high proficiency with absolutely no effort.

“It’s the same book, but what’s written in the book is not easy to read, so I adjusted it a little,” he said.

Huo Wujiu was speechless.

Jiang Suizhou looked at Huo Wujiu in bewilderment.

Although he went to war, he was still a person from the ancients, so he should be able to understand it, right?

But…why did he have this expression on his face?

Before Jiang Suizhou could make sense of it, Huo Wujiu suddenly closed the book in his hands and lazily put it to one side. He lightly said, “Change

to another book, I feel very bored of this one from two days ago, it’s not interesting.”

Jiang Suizhou was even more skeptical.

…No way, when I read it to you two days ago, you looked like you were listening enthusiastically though?

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Chapter 74

Luckily, Jiang Suizhou was also not very fond of that book. Since Huo Wujiu didn’t want to read it, he didn’t press on the matter.

The second day, Li Changning felt like Huo Wujiu looked a little better than two days ago.

His complexion was still pale, but it wasn’t as obvious as two days ago. Seeing him coming into the room, he lightly nodded at him.

Li Changning only thought it was because of the medical treatment process; it was normal for a patient’s condition to inevitably fluctuate.

He smiled as he said, “General Ye looks great today, did the treatment two days ago have some effect?”

Huo Wujiu didn’t feel any particular effects, but still gave a flattering light nod.

Li Changning was delighted.

When the treatment was done for today, Li Changning cleared away the medical kit, but as he was prepared to leave, Huo Wujiu raised his hand, calling Wei Kai to come.

“General?” Wei Kai hurriedly went to him.

He then heard Huo Wujiu say, “There’s something you need to do.”

Wei Kai revealed a surprised expression. “General, please speak!”

He knew he and the General were in the enemy camp now, so even if they had a plan, they had to quietly wait for an opportunity. At this moment, besides having done his best to find a way to cure the General's legs, he couldn't do anything else.

But he never had the chance to lay down his life for the General yet, causing him to be extremely eager.

Hearing Huo Wujiu say this, Wei Kai's eyes gleamed with light.

Then, he heard Huo Wujiu say, "Our men in the city are currently idle, right?"

Wei Kai vigorously nodded.

"Without General's order, no one dares to act rashly. This subordinate has arranged for them to hide in the inner city of Lin'an. If General has any instructions, this subordinate will immediately get in touch with them."

Huo Wujiu gave a sound of understanding.

"Then, these few days, think of a way to give Pang Shao some trouble."

Wei Kai was dazed for a moment.

This…it's fine if General doesn't give orders, but once he does, is it this exciting?

Wei Kai stared blankly at Huo Wujiu, and for a moment he forgot to respond.

He then saw Huo Wujiu lift his eyes, glancing nonchalantly at him.

"Not asking you to assassinate him." Huo Wujiu's face betrayed a subtle look of dislike.

Wei Kai blinked, then stammered, "Then…what does General mean by finding trouble…what kind of trouble?"

Huo Wujiu shifted his gaze and nonchalantly ordered.

“He has many errands for Jiang Shunheng, right? Make him screw up one or two times. If it’s significant, stir up trouble in front of Jiang Shunheng.”

Wei Kai fixedly stared while nodding.

Huo Wujiu lightly said, “Go.”

Wei Kai then retreated out with Li Changning.

Huo Wujiu quietly looked outside.

The things he could do right now were still small, but at least he wasn’t staying idle. Since Pang Shao wanted to give trouble to Jiang Suizhou, then he could also think of some ways to give Pang Shao trouble.

Although the battlefield was big, there were some imperceptible light breezes which could decide the whole battle.

He just needed to control where the breezes blew.

Huo Wujiu impassively withdrew his gaze. He picked up a book next to the bed, and furrowed his brows as he studied it in genuine scrutinization.

It was precisely the unfathomable book which he had thrown aside and labeled as “boring” yesterday.

——

Lin’an rained a lot. It had not been sunny for long before it rained again for several consecutive days.

It wasn’t strange for Lin’an to rain, but this time, the rain forced everyone on tenterhooks and feeling queasy.

Because this rain had toppled the ancestral temple in the northern side of the imperial palace.

The construction of that ancestral temple had just started two months ago: it wasn't finished yet. The rain came ferociously, destroying the imperial palace built in the recent two months into bits and pieces, practically into a pile of ruins.

This was truly a big taboo, an absolutely terrifying omen!

The tributes in the ancestral temple were all for the past emperors of Great Jing. It was the foundation of the imperial court, and was a place more important than the palace itself. Because Great Jing moved to the south, the Emperor harbored great aspirations, specially constructing the ancestral temple to face the north with its back to the south. This was to let the great ancestors oversee what was gained and lost, pointing to Ye City.

In the end, Ye City still had not recovered. Yet, this ancestral temple collapsed.

For a while, the rumors among the people caused a tremendous clamor until it couldn't be suppressed. Everyone said, Great Jing might perish. Even the children all around the city had composed a nursery rhyme about the perishment of Jing and the rising of Liang.

The Hou Zhu flew into a rage, and the court was in a chaotic mess.

Jingwang Manor, on the other hand, remained tranquil unlike the outside.

After the acupuncture session today, Huo Wujiu's legs could already move slightly.

The range of movement was very small, almost negligible, but because the wound had not healed, it was less easy to move. To him, however, it proved the effects of Li Changning's medication. For a while, the few people in the room held their breaths with rapt attention, jubilant.

Only Huo Wujiu on the bed had an indifferent expression.

He tried to move his legs as he said with an impassive voice, "That ancestral temple incident, you did it?"

Wei Kai mischievously laughed. “That’s right! Didn’t General say to stir up trouble for Pang Shao until it reaches the dog* emperor? Our men in the city had discreetly probed for information, and found that the construction of the ancestral temple is Pang Shao’s biggest project! This subordinate was a bit unsure at first, but the leader in charge of those men is clever, and guaranteed that it will succeed!”

*expression of cursing, like damned

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes to look at him, the corners of his eyebrows and eyes forming a smiling expression. He commended, “You’ve got guts.”

Wei Kai knew his General normally looked down on the masses, it was rare to see him smiling. With such an expression, it meant he was extremely pleased with their work.

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Chapter 75

He said with a smile, “And the nerve of that old fool Pang Shao, he even dared to embezzle the construction money of the ancestral temple. The constructed walls are all hollow, the material is also poor. Our men were only mixed in the workforce, and with just a small trick, the palace collapsed from the rain!”

Li Changning heard this, and on the side, he smiled as he chipped in, “That Pang-*daren* must have lived in the north for a perennial time, he had no idea that the rain in Jiangnan is very heavy, so he dared to be in deficit with the construction. With him constructing like this, even if you don’t act, that ancestral temple will surely not stand for many years.”

Saying this, he and Wei Kai laughed.

Huo Wujiu followed with a nod, and then raised his hand, interrupting Wei Kai’s laughter.

“The work is done, but don’t lower your guard,” he said. “Let them pay attention to Pang Manor’s activities. Pang Shao has suffered losses, he’ll definitely retaliate.”

Wei Kai said with a smile, “Don’t worry, General, this subordinate has made arrangements!”

Huo Wujiu gave a sound of assent, and lifted his eyes to look outside the window.

In the main house of Anyin Hall, people went in and out, all in an orderly manner.

———

Jiang Suizhou also immediately received an intel.

He didn’t expect that such a big change would occur in history. In the historical records, although Southern Jing’s court was corrupted, the ancestral temple collapsing as a result of corruption had never occurred.

However, to Jiang Suizhou, this was a very good thing.

Although Pang Shao was normally unruly, he wouldn’t bring corruption in the presence of the Hou Zhu. He had made a commotion for the Hou Zhu, and hustled money behind the Hou Zhu’s back. Even if he hustled more, he wouldn’t let the Hou Zhu know.

But this time, this embezzlement of his was discovered by the Hou Zhu. In addition, it was because he had razed down the ancestral temple where the Hou Zhu placed the ancestors’ memorial tablets.

As this matter was serious, although Pang Shao didn’t build the ancestral temple, it was entirely under his supervision. As soon as the temple collapsed, the Hou Zhu immediately wanted to send people to investigate, but the ruins were piled up there. Even if Pang Shao was very cunning, he couldn’t confuse black and white* and shirk from responsibility.

*confuse right and wrong

Since the Hou Zhu ascended the throne, this was the first time Pang Shao threw a curve in front of him.

Hou Zhu was enraged with Pang Shao for a long period of time, so much so that several adherents of Pang Shao were deposed and prosecuted. Most importantly, the Hou Zhu originally had complete trust in Pang Shao; small and big matters of the palace were all handed over to him with confidence. Now, cracks appeared in this trust.

This was the most satisfying thing for Jiang Suizhou.

He read the information several times, over and over again, only to think that Heaven’s eyes had opened, having dropped such a heavy rain.

However…

Before putting away the information, his gaze settled among the most unnoticeable section of words.

Among Pang Shao's adherents who were discharged, there were several officials from the Ministry of Personnel. People were dismissed, so the positions had emptied.

Usually, the Hou Zhu let Pang Shao arrange the transfer of officials. But now, Pang Shao was the one who committed a crime, so the Hou Zhu was clueless.

Hence, he settled with Qi Min's petition, and promoted several non-Pang party officials to the vacant seats. Some of them were young, novices who had just taken the imperial examination a few years ago.

Jiang Suizhou frowned.

He naturally knew Qi Min held absolutely no selfish intentions, this was entirely for the sake of the Jing Dynasty. But because of this person's seniority and bad temper, he was rather straightforward in speaking and doing things.

He had always been aggressively against Pang Shao, but because of Pang Shao's big influence, he had never achieved much. But since the beginning of Chen Ti's conviction, Pang's faction had suffered from several attacks in a row. In this stand, Qi Min got the upper hand.

Jiang Suizhou smoothened the edge of the paper.

He knew, to Qi Min, all of the defeats before were smoke bombs. Pang Shao knew he was all talk but no action, so he didn't regard him as anything special.

But now, Qi Min had encroached on Pang Shao's interest, becoming the person who seized the opportunity to hit him when he was down.

So, even if Qi Min is a venerable minister to three emperors, Pang Shao can also stir his heart.

In the historical records, Qi Min died unnaturally.

Before the Jing Dynasty was wiped out, his letters colluding with Northern Liang were found in his residence, so he was sentenced to death together with all his relatives. Until the later generations, historians had disputes over whether Qi Min really joined hands with Liang.

If it was true, it would be one thing, but if it was false…

Then this incident would most likely happen in advance because the butterfly flapped its wings.

——

When Jiang Suizhou entered Huo Wujiu's room at dusk today, Huo Wujiu was reading a book on his bed.

He looked as though he no longer needed Jiang Suizhou to accompany him every day, but both of them seemed to have reached an intriguing agreement, no one brought up this matter.

Instead, it was rather natural to spend some time together every day.

Seeing Jiang Suizhou sitting beside the bed, Huo Wujiu lifted his eyes to look at him. He asked, "Something good happened?"

Jiang Suizhou wore a joyful expression. He faintly smiled as he said, "Yes, actually."

With this said, he picked up the book next to the bed. He flipped as he said, "Have you heard? The heavy rain these two days razed down the ancestral temple in the northern side of the imperial palace."

Saying this, he raised his brows, looking at Huo Wujiu.

His joyful look was so obvious that Huo Wujiu couldn’t resist reminding him, “It’s also your family’s ancestral temple. The offerings inside are also your ancestors.”

Jiang Suizhou paid no heed.

“Wasn’t it only halfway built? The memorial tablets hadn’t been moved in yet, right?” he said. “Besides, it was messed up by Pang Shao. If the great ancestors want to blame someone, they can’t blame me for schadenfreude.”

Huo Wujiu paused after hearing what he said.

It was not really Pang Shao’s bunglement. In essence, this incident was his doing.

However, Huo Wujiu even had wantonly beaten the country of the Jiang family; it was but an icing on the cake to bear another revenge in mind about destroying someone’s ancestral temple.

At this particular moment, he heard Jiang Suizhou open his mouth with hints of a smile.

“If it’s like this, you’re someone who’s married to this Prince’s residence, and is also recorded in this Prince’s genealogy. This revenge of destroying the ancestral temple, this Prince has recorded it on Pang Shao’s head for you.”

The author has something to say:

Jiang Suizhou: Since you’re married to our Jiang family, our Jiang family’s ancestors are also yours.

Huo Wujiu: That’s your maternal family, doesn’t count.

Jiang Suizhou: ?

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Chapter 76

After Jiang Suizhou blurted out these words, he frightened himself and his heart thumped.

Sure enough, Huo Wujiu had been amiable to him for too long. At the moment, the atmosphere was peaceful, causing him to momentarily speak his mind, actually making such a joke with Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou formed a faint smile on his face that was calm and composed, despite his heart crumbling into a mess of nervousness. He took a furtive glance at Huo Wujiu from behind the book.

And saw Huo Wujiu pause, raising his eyes to shoot him a look.

Still those calm, unwavering black eyes, with no particular sentiments. The space between his brows was smoothened out, as though not upset.

After that, he surprisingly hooked up the corners of his mouth, revealing a wan smile.

“That truly is a bitter and deep-seated hatred,” Huo Wujiu said.

Somehow, Jiang Suizhou felt that those four words “bitter and deep-seated hatred” carried some profound meaning he didn’t understand.

However, he didn’t bother to probe into this.

He blinked, and stared fixedly at Huo Wujiu, only to feel that his smile was especially pretty.

——

After this, Jiang Suizhou set his eyes on the activities of the courtroom every day.

Less than half of Xu Du's death soldiers were dispatched, there were still roughly ten that remained in the capital. These few days, these people had been delivering intel to Jiang Suizhou in a steady stream. Combined with the news delivered from the court's officials, these were all the information that Jiang Suizhou could obtain now.

He had carefully read the information delivered to his hands word by word, remembered them in his heart, and tried to analyze Pang Shao's movements from the various representations of the court's higher and lower positions.

Sure enough, within a few days, an official from the palace made contact with Pang Shao.

This official wasn't Pang Shao's adherent at all. Previously, he basically didn't have any contact with Pang Shao. But these days, the contact between both of them suddenly became extremely frequent.

But, because of Pang Shao's excessive vigilance, no matter if it was a secret meeting or for mutual benefits with the other party, he didn't let Jiang Suizhou's men find out which official was in contact with him.

Jiang Suizhou had no choice but to analyze with a linkage of his own memory of this section of history.

But, during this period, more than one official was framed by Pang Shao, and the accomplices among them amounted to even a larger number. Jiang Suizhou still pondered over it for a long time, and yet he couldn't determine what exactly Pang Shao was planning.

So on this one day, he summoned Gu Changyun to his room.

Although Gu Changyun wasn't as reliable as Xu Du, he was extremely clever and had photographic memory. He remembered all the information the original owner had received before he crossed over.

When he hurried to his room, Jiang Suizhou made all the servants go out, leaving only Gu Changyun in the room alone. Then, he took out the information and intel he had sorted out to discuss with Gu Changyun.

The information in their hands was rather complex and tediously long, handling them was also not easy.

Hence, Meng Qianshan, who was long driven away from Jiang Suizhou's room, folded his arms as he waited below the veranda, feeling bored to death. Straight from early in the morning, he waited until high noon, until Li Changning finished giving Huo Wujiu acupuncture, carrying the medical kit as he came out of Huo Wujiu's room with Wei Kai.

Meng Qianshan saw them acutely, and as he had nothing to do, he planned to step forward and see them off.

But he didn't expect these two people to come over to him.

Walking up to him, Li Changning said with a smile, "Why is Meng-*gonggong** standing outside the room?"
*form of address for a court eunuch

Meng Qianshan replied with a smile, "Someone is in His Highness' room, he instructed us to wait outside for a while."

Smiling, Li Changning nodded. He said, "Madam Huo happened to see you just now, and seemed to have something to ask you. He asked this servant when going out to request you to drop by."

Meng Qianshan's heart thumped.

His Highness was seeing Madam Gu in his room, and Madam Huo summoned him for questioning?

Meng Qianshan was terrified in his heart, and had an inauspicious feeling.

He responded with a smile, then rushed into Huo Wujiu's room.

These two days, the rain just stopped. The sky was still gloomy, so the light in the room wasn't very good either. Huo Wujiu was leaning against the bedstead, the quilt covering just at his waist, currently flipping through the book in his hands, clearly not reading.

Meng Qianshan hurriedly stepped forward to give his salute.

"Madam Huo, you summoned this humble slave?" he said with a smile.

Huo Wujiu didn't lift his eyes. "What were you doing standing in the courtyard?"

Although his voice was calm, it was colder than normal. Meng Qianshan feigned ignorance as he shook with fright. "His Highness is receiving a guest, this humble slave went out for fresh air…"

Huo Wujiu stopped fiddling with the book.

He had seen in the morning that the person who entered was Gu Changyun. As soon as Gu Changyun came, Jiang Suizhou drove out all of the people in the room.

All morning, he didn't feel the pain from the acupuncture at all, and only felt a strange energy tearing at his soul, pulling his thoughts to the main room of Anyin Hall.

He was extremely fidgety, but didn't know what made him so vexed.

He clearly knew Jingwang didn't have any other thoughts about him, that it was completely his own misunderstanding. Besides, Jingwang already had concubines, which was different from his own "concubine" title that fell short of reality and was used as a cover.

These were all given facts and had nothing to do with him. Yet, he still thought of these and was terribly vexed, like a stranded beast in a cage.

Huo Wujiu didn't speak, and Meng Qianshan trembled with fear on the side.

He was obliged to admit, “His Highness summoned Madam Gu in the morning, most likely to discuss some trivial matters of the residence…”

Discussing trivial matters did not need the dismissal of the servants.

Huo Wujiu heard this as though Meng Qianshan was fooling him, but his upset feeling right now seemed to be firmly locked up, so there was no way to express his anger.

He paused.

“En, you may leave,” he said.

Meng Qianshan never thought he would get past this so easily. Granted an amnesty, it didn’t take long for him to turn around and run.

But behind him, Huo Wujiu’s attention was not on him.

He raised his eyes to look outside the window. Beneath the misty, overcast sky, that door was tightly closed.

He only felt that he seemed to be falling into the enemy’s trap.

Firmly surrounded with nowhere to hide, much less to run away.

——

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Chapter 77

Gu Changyun toned down the scope for Jiang Suizhou. Jiang Suizhou could roughly determine that this time, Pang Shao wanted to deal with Qi Min.

He had spared Qi Min for such a long time, only because Qi Min was not a threat to him. But once he became a threat, the venerable Qi Min would definitely be finished off by Pang Shao.

Jiang Suizhou knew that this had nothing to do with him. Getting involved would mean meddling with their affairs.

But he had to step in.

No matter if it was because of Pang Shao, Qi Min, or because of himself.

But, in later generations, there had always been disputes about whether Qi Min had contacts with Northern Liang, and he didn't know if Qi Min really was in Pang Shao's hands now, or if someone would frame him because of this ruse, and who would frame him.

The whole day, he was clueless, until the sky gradually darkened. Only when Meng Qianshan came to his room to light a lantern, did he suddenly feel himself aching all over, his head dizzy and light-headed.

He ought to rest.

He lifted his eyes. After sizing up his own deserted house, he stood up.

"Your Highness?" Meng Qianshan hastily moved toward him.

"This Prince will check on Madam Huo," Jiang Suizhou said.

His decision was very natural, and he didn’t notice Meng Qianshan’s momentary smile of surprise. He got up and walked out, walking around the winding corridor, then walked up to Huo Wujiu’s door.

There was a maid who notified earlier that Huo Wujiu happened to be having dinner. When Jiang Suizhou entered, the table already had another bowl and chopsticks prepared for him.

Jiang Suizhou sat in front of the table, only to feel the muddled energy in his body cleared up.

Huo Wujiu lifted his eyes, but saw he hadn’t yet smoothened the space between his brows.

He paused.

Before this, he had never met a person who was this difficult to handle and so furiously helpless.

He felt irritated the whole day, and now that he saw the source that made him fidgety, by just looking at the other party, the accumulated emotions of the whole day were sealed by the gloomy and tired face of that person.

There was also only him that remained in his eyes.

Huo Wujiu was silent for a moment, but he couldn’t help opening his mouth.

“In trouble?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou had just picked up his bowl and chopsticks when he heard Huo Wujiu ask this.

It was naturally useless telling Huo Wujiu these things, but he still really wanted to. Especially with him asking, he couldn’t contain himself even more.

There was a sense of a tired bird throwing itself into the woods*.

*tired bird throwing itself into the woods (proverb) – finding someone/a place to feel safe.

His hand stopped moving, before placing his bowl down and waving his hand. Meng Qianshan tacitly understood, and hurriedly ushered out the waiting servants in the room. He himself also withdrew, closing the door for them.

Jiang Suizhou picked up a dish with his chopsticks, and said, “After the ancestral temple collapse, if Pang Shao wants to take his anger out on somebody, who do you think is the easiest target.”

Huo Wujiu didn’t lift his eyes as he said, “The Ministry of Ceremonies.”

The Ministry of Ceremonies he was referring to was precisely Qi Min. Jiang Suizhou paused, staring intently at Huo Wujiu, his chopsticks hanging in midair.

How did Huo Wujiu know the outcome he had been analyzing for days?

Then, he saw Huo Wujiu look up at him. He said, “Pang Shao committed a big crime. Even if he can’t be punished, a part of the adherents can settle accounts with him. In the court, besides him, the Ministry of Ceremonies Qi Min is the most eloquent, and he’s also on bad terms with Pang Shao all year round. At this time, he will naturally overwhelm Pang Shao, giving him a disadvantage. In this situation, Pang Shao definitely won’t sit by and watch.”

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help being impressed in his heart.

He had Southern Jing palace affairs at his fingertips, no wonder he was undefeated for years. This sole ability of knowing both the enemy and himself, it wasn’t something an ordinary general could possess.

Nodding, Jiang Suizhou said, “That’s right, this Prince also surmised as such. But Pang Shao is being careful, what he wants to do is still unclear until now.”

Huo Wujiu looked at him. He said, “Collusion.”

Jiang Suizhou was dumbfounded, then heard Huo Wujiu continue, “To kill Qi Min, this is the most direct and simplest way.”

Huo Wujiu’s opinion happened to conform with his, but he had so many historical materials as evidence, so how did Huo Wujiu think of it?

He couldn’t help but look Huo Wujiu up and down.

Huo Wujiu made him look a little uncomfortable.

It was only the result of Wei Kai’s report today regarding his lookout over the past few days. Although it wasn’t ascertained what Pang Shao wanted to do, he could guess bits and pieces.

He cleared his throat, then said, “Although Qi Min is at odds with Pang Shao, he has never been in touch with us. If caught colluding, he’ll be a victim of false charges.”

Jiang Suizhou slowly said, “To make false charges, evidence is definitely needed. So, there will definitely be someone who fabricates evidence against Qi Min for Pang Shao. The person who fabricates the evidence needs to be someone Qi Min has the most trust in…”

With this said, his eyes gradually brightened.

“I’ve sent people to investigate these two days, to see who actually has this motive! The person that most likely contacts Pang Shao secretly, and also has some relations to this…”

Huo Wujiu looked at him, and the chopsticks in his hand turned with ease, softly knocking Jiang Suizhou’s forehead.

“Go investigate his student, the one who won third place in the imperial examination ten years ago,” he said.

Surprise enveloped Jiang Suizhou’s face. “You know this, too?”

Of course he knew. This was what Wei Kai discovered yesterday, and had just reported to Huo Wujiu this morning.

Huo Wujiu paused, but swallowed down the truth.

“Of course,” he indifferently said.

“You’ve investigated for so many days, and you don’t even know this? When you have time, why not go do some proper business, instead of being openly lascivious with a concubine in the daylight.”

The author has something to say:

No prize Q&A:

What is General Huo’s special skill?

A. March to war, defeat the many with the few, sever the enemy’s head with an arrow in front of two battle formations

B. Be extremely jealous, peculiarly striving for favor

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Chapter 78

Openly…Openly what?

Jiang Suizhou was stumped by Huo Wujiu's words. He was dazed for a long time, before registering what Huo Wujiu said.

He immediately laughed, and unwittingly said, "It's different from what you're thinking."

Huo Wujiu was dumbfounded for a moment when he heard him, and asked, "What?"

The tea cup Jiang Suizhou was drinking paused before his lips. Then, he looked up at Huo Wujiu.

Not even Meng Qianshan, nor anyone else in the residence, knew about the relationship between him and those two concubines, only three of them knew.

Logic told Jiang Suizhou, the less people who knew about the relationship between him and the two concubines, the better. And not to mention, although he had spilled everything to Huo Wujiu, this matter was unnecessary to mention; saying it would instead cause an inconvenience.

But…

Under the gaze of those clear black eyes, Jiang Suizhou felt as though he lost all reasoning.

"Those two are merely aids kept by this Prince in the residence," he said.

Only after the words came out did Jiang Suizhou realize what he just said to Huo Wujiu. He somewhat regretted it at once, feeling that he was being impetuous just now.

But since the words were already out, he couldn’t take them back. He could only console himself.

At any rate, Huo Wujiu and him now were grasshoppers tied together with a piece of string*, and Huo Wujiu had long understood the relationship between him and the Hou Zhu, too. Letting him know one or two other matters didn’t matter much.

*grasshoppers tied together with a piece of string (idiom) – people who are tied to each other for the better or worse

With this in mind, he continued, “This Prince pretends to be a cutsleeve just to hoodwink the public and let the emperor relax his vigilance with this Prince. And those two are also kept in this residence in the name of concubines. Yesterday, this Prince summoned Gu Changyun to come and discuss Pang Shao’s matter.”

After he finished, Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help hooking up the corners of his mouth, sitting upright in his seat, waiting for Huo Wujiu’s response.

Huo Wujiu would surely feel moved by his sincerity, right? After all, to him, this was a very big secret. He even told Huo Wujiu about all these matters, so his sincerity of working together with him should be clear.

However, he waited for a good while, and Huo Wujiu still had not uttered a word.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t resist looking up at him.

To see Huo Wujiu pick up his chopsticks, lower his head, then continue eating.

“You…” Bewilderment washed over Jiang Suizhou’s face.

Then, he saw Huo Wujiu lift his eyes to shoot him a glance, before lowering his eyes back and giving a light sound of understanding.

“Got it,” he said.

“But, this has nothing to do with me.”

As expected of Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou indignantly gritted his teeth, but also picked up his chopsticks and continued eating.

But he didn’t see, the person in front with his head lowered was actually not eating. Instead, he was trying hard to hold back the lift of the corners of his mouth.

——

Having a clear target made it more convenient for Jiang Suizhou to handle matters.

That student of Qi Min was called Zhao Dunting, and he served in the Ministry of Personnel. He wasn’t a high-ranking official, but his tasks were very lucrative. His residence wasn’t as heavily-guarded as Pang Shao’s; Xu Du’s subordinates rather easily hid outside his residence, watching his everyday movements clearly.

Sure enough, the time when he was working outside coincided with the time when Pang Shao met with the mysterious courtier.

It really was him.

Jiang Suizhou only felt that this person hid too well, until all parties involved had died in his previous life. He also didn’t reveal his identity, and no one found out he was Pang Shao’s adherent.

This made it clear that although this official didn’t do much work, his skills were rather exceptional.

Jiang Suizhou asked Xu Du to remain watching his movements discreetly, not only to check when he would meet Pang Shao, but also to see whether he went to meet other people.

On the contrary, he had many contacts with Qi Min.

There were very few records about this person in the historical records, with most revolving around Qi Min.

He was Qi Min's disciple. But Qi Min was an extremely upright person, even his relatives and friends wouldn't have any sort of sheltered protection in the court. So even though he had students everywhere, he was not as powerful as Pang Shao, and he had no clique.

But this Zhao Dunting was particularly close to him.

Even if he had been in the palace for ten years, Qi Min didn't look after him much. He even more didn't have anything to rely on, and was extremely low-ranking. Yet, he still treated Qi Min like his own father. Even after Qi Min's collusion, he presented a petition to beg Hou Zhu to let Qi Min's corpse stay intact.

Exactly because of this, although his ranking as an official wasn't high, he was rather wise in the palace affairs.

Since spring arrived in Jiangnan, the rain kept pouring. Every time it rained, Qi Min's joints seemed to always ache, so Zhao Dunting had sent medicine to Qi Min early.

Jiang Suizhou's death soldiers had inspected that medicine. It was an ordinary medicine, no other things were mixed.

After the medicine was delivered, Zhao Dunting still visited Qi Min every now and then. But Qi Min's whole family was already accustomed to this, especially Qi Min's wife, who treated Zhao Dunting especially dearly.

Jiang Suizhou calmly waited.

Sure enough, it didn’t take long for Xu Du to deliver him several letters of rubbings*.

*rubbings (or stone rubbings) are inscriptions cut in stone to create a copy of the original

They were brought back by Zhao Dunting from Pang Shao. Placed in the study, they were copied by Jiang Suizhou’s death soldiers, and then were delivered to Jiang Suizhou.

Looking at the contents of those several letters alone, they were all sent from Northern Liang and were written for spies. The letters very carefully inquired about every information of Southern Jing’s palace. And the last letter that was half-written, the handwriting alone was impressively Qi Min’s.

They had forged Northern Liang’s letters as well as Qi Min’s replies.

The secret letters were forged so realistically, even the names of the sender and recipient were stamped. Jiang Suizhou looked through the letters repeatedly, then slowly put them away with a grave look.

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Chapter 79

Xu Du scrutinized his expression, and asked, “Your Highness, do you need this subordinate to steal the original?”

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment, then shook his head.

“If the letters are lost, their framing this time will definitely not succeed, but, what about next time?”

Saying this, he looked at Xu Du.

“We know Zhao Dunting is the perpetrator now, but if Zhao Dunting’s letters are gone, Pang Shao will definitely know. Never mind that Pang Shao might trace it back to us, let’s say he no longer uses Zhao Dunting, replaces him with other people, then does it again; what should we do then?”

Xu Du slowly nodded.

“Your Highness is right. It’s easy for us to check Zhao Dunting, but if Pang Shao is alert, then we can only prevent it this time, and it will be harder the next time. Then, Qi-*daren* is still in danger.”

Jiang Suizhou hummed, holding the letters as he pondered.

“But, if not stopped, in two days, Zhao Dunting will place this fabricated evidence in Qi-*daren*’s residence,” Xu Du said. “By then, once the court checks, Qi-*daren* will be beyond saving.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“So…this Prince is thinking, what if we can satisfy both sides,” he said.

Xu Du mulled over his words, and suddenly froze.

“Your Highness means…” He hesitated.

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“We’ll have to risk it,” he said.

——

That day, he and Xu Du discussed the whole morning. After the discussion was over, he properly hid the evidence and letters before seeing Xu Du out the door.

As soon as he was outside his place, Xu Du oddly gave out a surprise “eh?”.

“What’s the matter?” Jiang Suizhou asked.

Xu Du looked around.

“Why do I not see Changyun?” he said.

Jiang Suizhou was confused. “Gu Changyun is here?”

Xu Du nodded. They were now outside the door, and all around them were maids and servants. When he opened his mouth again, his form of address had changed.

“Your Highness, Changyun came together with this concubine this morning. Since this concubine needed to meet with Your Highness alone, he got angry and said he’ll wait outside.”

Hearing this, Jiang Suizhou was rather speechless with this drama queen Gu Changyun.

But it was also probably because Gu Changyun feigned this harem fight scenario too seriously. The residence’s higher and lower positions all knew he was haughty from the master’s indulgence, and especially that he was a

rambunctious little devil, no one ever doubted the concubine status of the two people.

Much less doubting Jiang Suizhou being a cutsleeve.

Jiang Suizhou looked around. Not seeing the person's figure, he said, "He might have gone back first. Leave him alone, just go."

But at this moment, Meng Qianshan hastily rushed over.

"Your Highness!" He spoke in urgency. "What if you check Madam Huo's room?"

Jiang Suizhou furrowed his brows.

"What's happened?" he asked.

And saw Meng Qianshan's face enveloping with worry.

"This…earlier, Madam Gu was insistent on visiting Madam Huo's room. This humble slave couldn't stop him, so…"

He stumbled over his words.

"So, Madam Gu has been sitting in Madam Huo's room for a long time."

——

Wei Kai's face was ashen as he stood upright next to the medicine stove like a flagpole, staring fixedly at the small stove above the fire, wishing he could stare a hole right at that small mud stove.

Behind him, the beautiful childe clad in red was reclining on the divan, a small cup of tea in his hands.

It was Gu Changyun.

Today's sun was truly bright, it shone scorchingly in the early morning. Gu Changyun was waiting for Xu Du in the courtyard, but he didn't see him

come out after waiting for a while, then realized he must have a matter to discuss with the master.

There would be no end in waiting, then. Since Gu Changyun didn't want to suffer under the sun in the courtyard, and the chair Meng Qianshan brought out was also not comfortable. Thinking that going back at this time wouldn't suit his status, he simply went to hide in Huo Wujiu's room.

The room was extremely lively. Besides those ever-silent servants, there were four people in total including him.

However, Huo Wujiu never paid any heed to him, currently lying on the bed without uttering a word. The other two were doctors that had received entry to the residence. Last time, to make it more convenient for him to observe the skills of those doctors coming from different regions, and to scare off the fish in troubled waters*, he specially put forth a cunning look. So when these two came into the residence, they suffered a lot.

*fish in troubled waters (idiom) – to reap benefit from confusion Hence, as soon as he came in a while ago, these two meekly saluted him, and as though he wasn't there, they went about their own business.

However, Gu Changyun also wasn't interested in them. Doctors merely used medicine to check on the ill, so he wasn't interested in Huo Wujiu's legs, nor was he inclined to know how they treated Huo Wujiu and what the result would be.

Gu Changyun merely felt extremely bored.

He held the tea and looked around, before finally landing his gaze on Huo Wujiu.

He recalled that when Huo Wujiu looked at him last time, there was murderous intent concealed beneath those serene black eyes.

Gu Changyun never feared death, and was instead interested in the meaning behind this.

If Huo Wujiu was fed up with him, he shouldn’t have such vehemence, but if he was jealous, then this person’s jealousy was too fierce, wasn’t it?

Last time, Jiang Suizhou was a part of the scene, so Gu Changyun didn’t have time to look carefully and only felt regrettable, but leaving it until now gave him a good opportunity to kill time.

With this in mind, Gu Changyun put down the cup of tea and smiled charmingly.

“This room is truly bright, it’s a bit more spacious than my main house.” Saying this, he looked at Huo Wujiu, smiling.

“Madam Huo has only been in the prince’s residence for a while, and receives such a special favor from His Highness, it really makes *gege* envious.”

Huo Wujiu indifferently raised his eyes. After giving him a glance, the tides in his eyes were calm, as light as still water.

Instead, it was Wei Kai in the corner whose eye rims turned bright red from anger. His hands even started trembling.

That’s pushing too far! Their General, how could this concubine treat him like this? This was simply a great humiliation!

But at this moment, he heard the General’s gentle voice.

“It’s just new people replacing the old.”

Gentle and calm. For a moment, it didn’t dawn that he was joking.

Wei Kai’s eyes went wide open.

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Chapter 80

Huo Wujiu could tell what this subordinate of Jiang Suizhou was thinking.

If he was really Jiang Suizhou's concubine, saying these words would not be strange. But since he wasn't, putting forth this kind of act was only to poke fun at him.

Huo Wujiu recalled the few times he saw this person ever since he was confined in Jingwang Manor, and was even more certain about this.

After Huo Wujiu said those words, he nonchalantly shot him a glance.

He would never let other people get away with such thoughts, especially when directed at him.

Gu Changyun was stunned upon hearing his words.

He thought that Huo Wujiu was a prisoner who was normally quiet, that it wasn't a big deal to randomly mess with him as he had nothing to do.

But what he didn't know was that Huo Wujiu as a child was notorious in Yangguan for his apathetic facade being inwardly vicious. He looked silent, his face full of supercilious arrogance. But actually, no one dared to offend him.

And the boy that suffered under his hand secretly gave a nickname behind his back, saying that he was a dog that bit and seldom barked.

For a moment, Gu Changyun's words were stuck in his throat, his eyes showing surprise as he dazedly looked at Huo Wujiu.

"You…"

He saw Huo Wujiu looking at him impassively. His legs were clearly full of terrifying silver needles, and his lips were pale, but his expression was calm and composed, derision even playing on his lips.

“I, what?” He smoothly glanced outside the window. “Didn’t you come here to hear these words?”

After that, he lowered his eyes, no longer speaking.

Gu Changyun was stunned, before he braced himself up and continued his act after some difficulty.

He didn’t expect Huo Wujiu to respond to him, even rendering him speechless. Embarrassed, he stood up, ready to spout some nonsense, looking to rectify himself before snatching the opportunity to leave.

“Okay, I came only to ask for tea, casually said a few words, and you talked back like this!” he said. “Since Madam Huo does not welcome me, I will not bother you. I’ll just see what exactly is new people replacing the old, and until when His Highness will favor you…”

After that, he turned around to walk out.

But saw Jiang Suizhou entering the door with a frown.

Separated by a small hall, Gu Changyun saw that Jiang Suizhou didn’t look very good.

Gu Changyun thought, ‘*not good’* in his heart. He knew he had crossed the line and hurriedly stepped forward to give his salute.

“Forgive me, Your Highness, this concubine was discourteous!”

Jiang Suizhou looked at him rather speechless.

He knew Gu Changyun loved to stir up trouble and put on an act, but his mind was at least clear, so how could he do such an unreasonable thing to Huo Wujiu, provoking him like that?

Since the other party was his own subordinate, he didn’t feel like berating him. He only warned in a cold voice, “Get out. Next time, without this Prince’s order, you’re not allowed to come here.”

Gu Changyun knew Jiang Suizhou was saving his face, so he lowered his head and retreated out.

Just before he left, he couldn’t help raising his eyes, glancing at the bed situated at the innermost side of the room.

That person on the bed quietly closed his eyes, as though no words had been exchanged, letting the doctor do the acupuncture.

Unexpectedly, this dog didn’t bite and wouldn’t bark.

Gu Changyun gritted his teeth.

He knew that Huo Wujiu was ambitious and proud, was conceited and arrogant, and liked to brush others off, thus appearing awfully intimidating. But he didn’t expect for this person’s scheming to be this deep, especially good at adding fuel to the flames, that he made Gu Changyun make a mistake in front of the master with a few words.

Gu Changyun kneeled over in the gutter* for the first time.
*kneel over in the gutter (idiom) – to fail unexpectedly, as failure was not expected

——

After Gu Changyun left, regret filled Jiang Suizhou.

However, he knew Gu Changyun’s identity was a secret. At this moment, there were many ears in the room, so he couldn’t speak much.

He only said impassively, “He won’t bother you again.” And sat down on one side.

Huo Wujiu gave a sound of understanding, calmly looking at his own legs full of needles without a word.

He naturally knew Gu Changyun wouldn’t bother him again.

In the first place, Gu Changyun didn’t bother him much; he just wanted to make him choke on his words, let him taste his own medicine for messing with him. But just as a word got out his mouth, Huo Wujiu didn’t expect to hear Jiang Suizhou’s footsteps outside the door.

He had to turn to the offensive and provoke Gu Changyun to the point of flaring up, singling himself out in passing.

Subconsciously, he didn’t want to leave a bad impression on Jingwang.

Instead, let Gu Changyun slip up in front of Jingwang, in passing…

He glanced up at Jiang Suizhou.

And saw Jiang Suizhou, who was sitting under the window, with an indifferent and quiet expression. He was randomly flipping through a book in his hands, looking rather embarrassed, as though he had made a mistake.

Huo Wujiu’s lips lifted up, then withdrew his gaze.

This image of him holding his joy and anger in high value would always pose some unnecessary delusions.

The room was quiet for a while, until Huo Wujiu drank his medicine, and the two people cleaned up and left.

Only then did Jiang Suizhou open his mouth.

“Gu Changyun is only playful, don’t take it to heart,” he said.

Huo Wujiu pulled up his quilt, covering his own legs. He hmmed and said, “Doesn’t matter.”

Jiang Suizhou sighed, taking the book as he sat next to the bed. “Luckily, you’re magnanimous, he went too far today.”

Huo Wujiu's expression was calm and composed, as though it wasn't him who added fuel to the flames just now.

Then, he heard Jiang Suizhou continue. "Xu Du came a while ago, because letters were indeed found at Zhao Dunting's."

"Zhao Dunting?" Huo Wujiu raised his eyes.

Jiang Suizhou said, "It's as you said the other day, that disciple of Qi Min, who won third in the imperial examination ten years ago."

Huo Wujiu gave a sound of understanding. "What letters?"

"Northern Liang's letters," Jiang Suizhou said. "They were brought back from Pang Shao. The letters were imitated especially realistically, even stamped with Northern Liang's official seal."

Huo Wujiu frowned. "What official seal?"

Jiang Suizhou took out the rubbings from his sleeves, handing them to Huo Wujiu.

He saw Huo Wujiu unfold the envelope, flipping through them for some time. In the end, his gaze stayed on the seal at the end of the letter. He was wordless for a moment.

Jiang Suizhou saw him pause stiffly, quietly stroking the edge of the seal a few times.

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Chapter 81

“What’s the matter?” he anxiously asked.

Only after a short while did Huo Wujiu open his mouth. When he did, his voice was hoarse.

“Pang Shao copied this?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded. “Yes, is something wrong?”

Huo Wujiu stared fixedly at that seal, his eyes ablaze, as if wanting to burn those letters.

“It’s Liang’s crown prince’s personal seal,” he slowly said.

“*Without flaw*.”

Jiang Suizhou blinked, puzzled.

Liang’s crown prince?

The current Northern Liang emperor’s heir was weak. There were only three sons altogether, two of whom died on the battlefield. It was the Battle of Xunyang that nearly wiped out the Liang army, causing Huo Wujiu’s father and Emperor Zhaoyuan’s two sons to die, as well as leaving Emperor Zhaoyuan’s whole body with old injuries. Henceforth, he remained weak.

And his only remaining son Huo Yuyan also fell ill on the battlefield. Less than two years after his accession, he would die because of the illness, dying just as he passed the age of thirty.

In other words, this seal was Huo Yuyan’s.

“Then?” Jiang Suizhou continued to ask.

Huo Wujiu stared at that seal and opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

He couldn’t utter a word. This seal was his *tangxiong*’s* personal seal, it was usually used for confidential letters that were extremely important.

*tang xiong – older male cousin (son of father’s brother) When they were young, the two brothers were garrisoned in different positions. When Huo Yuyan sent him letters, he would always stamp using this seal. After his *shufu** ascended the throne, his *tangxiong* became the crown prince. This seal was frequently used to pass on messages to his subordinates outside the area.

*shu fu – uncle (father’s younger brother)

So…how could Pang Shao copy this seal?

——

That day, Jiang Suizhou didn’t get a straight answer. Huo Wujiu looked at the letter for a moment, then said he wanted to keep it, and that he would inform him if he found anything.

Jiang Suizhou somewhat trusted him. Hearing him say that, he told him to keep the letters safe, then left it with him.

Afterwards, in his residence, he quietly devised strategies.

Ten days later, the palace suddenly fell into chaos.

Something happened to Qi Min.

Allegedly, when Qi Min’s student Zhao Dunting was chatting with him in Qi Min’s study, he suddenly saw something he shouldn’t have. After he left, he rushed into the imperial palace to meet the emperor. Tears streamed down as he spoke, saying that his own teacher was confused for a while, having done something he shouldn’t have, and begged the emperor to spare his teacher’s life.

He cried so much that the Hou Zhu was baffled, so he simply sent people to check Qi Min’s residence. Unexpectedly, one thing was ascertained after the investigation, they found Qi Min’s letters colluding with another country.

A senior minister to three emperors actually had a mutual exchange with Northern Liang!

Everyone believed, this disciple who was filial and treated Qi Min as his own father would never frame him, and when Qi Min faced this disciple in the court, he was also speechless.

He only gazed at those letters that were found from the search, as well as Zhao Dunting who knelt crying on the side, saying that he was confused. His face ghastly, he didn’t speak for a moment.

Much later, he crouched on the ground, deeply giving three loud kowtows to the Hou Zhu.

Meaning, he had nothing to say.

For a while, the court and the common people were in great shock, and the Hou Zhu also flew into rage, immediately wanting to pull Qi Min’s whole family for a beheading. Luckily, many ministers held him back, told him that he should confine Qi Min first, thoroughly investigate this case, and ascertain if there were other accomplices, especially finding out those people collaborating with the force outside.

When handling Northern Liang matters, the Hou Zhu always dealt with extraordinarily stupendous energy.

So, he forcefully swallowed his fury and locked Qi Min’s whole family in prison, waiting for a clear result before deciding how he should die.

For a period of time, all the imperial court officials were in a mess, only Jingwang Manor was peaceful.

Huo Wujiu looked outside the window for the third time.

He knew Qi Min’s case had caused great trouble these few days. After he discussed the plan with Jiang Suizhou, Jiang Suizhou sent people to handle it.

Today was the day when this case broke out. Jiang Suizhou hurried to Xu Du’s place early in the morning, waiting for information from the spy.

“General?”

He heard the call from the side.

It was Li Changning. He and Wei Kai were gathered around in front of his bed, looking at him with gleaming eyes.

“General doesn’t need to worry, just try,” Li Changing said.

Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze, turning his body over to get out of bed, his feet placed on the steps in front of the bed, slowly exerting strength.

And came a familiar feeling that had left him for a long time.

His meridian still hurt, but there was a surging strength he had not felt for a long time amidst the pain. The muscles of his legs were stiff, but there was strength along his meridian, linking all the way until his toes.

He clumsily yet steadily stood up.

The two people around him immediately gave out surprised cries.

Huo Wujiu tried to lift his legs, but he still couldn’t really walk. Nevertheless, it was the first time in two months that he stood up.

Joyful cheers rang in his ears, he could even see the glistening teardrops in Wei Kai’s twinkling eyes. But Huo Wujiu was not as happy as he had imagined.

He raised his eyes for the fourth time, looking outside.

The doors of Anyin Hall’s main house were open. People went in and out, but its master was not inside.

Huo Wujiu paused, withdrew his gaze, and sat back on the bed.

This was the first time he realized: joy, it turned out, must be shared with other people to be truly be set free.

And, it also must be with a specific, certain someone.

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Chapter 82

Huo Wujiu was well aware that if certain words weren't spoken now, it would be very hard to say them the next time; if some lies were admitted, it would also be difficult to turn back.

For instance, Li Changning's case.

In the beginning, Li Changning lied to Jiang Suizhou, saying that his legs couldn't be cured. Wei Kai also disguised as Li Changning's disciple instead of his subordinate. He had told those lies at that time, so if he now told Jiang Suizhou he could stand up, it would mean admitting to that lie.

Maybe he had no experience in lying, so he didn't know how to face it. It could also be because he somehow had an inexplicable guilty conscience, not daring to let Jiang Suizhou know the thoughts behind his deception.

In a nutshell, his strong desire to share his joy with Jiang Suizhou was shoved back in with difficulty, as if a fishbone was swallowed and got stuck in his throat, pricking him painfully.

And this suffering of his naturally wasn't known to Jiang Suizhou.

He was over at Xu Du's, sitting together drinking tea.

The other day, he discussed this matter with Huo Wujiu to hear his opinion. Huo Wujiu also agreed with his risky plan, so he settled as such.

He gathered up all the original owner's connections, found one hiding in the Ministry of Justice, and contacted him in secret. When that person knew Qi Min would be murdered, he was quite willing to help, so that person became the one who saved Qi Min's life today in the courtroom.

Jiang Suizhou told him to start talking when the Hou Zhu was enraged—to spare Qi Min's life for the time being, and assuming an indignant look, to cut the weeds and dig up the roots, ferreting out those traitors hiding behind Qi Min.

Pang Shao and Zhao Dunting's plan was quite secretive. Even if it was their own faction's people, there wouldn't be many people who knew. As long as this official raised this idea, it was inevitable for these people to respond. After all, even if caught, it would be the officials that opposed Pang's faction, and it would only benefit, not harm, them.

As such, Qi Min's life was retained for the time being.

Afterward, another person went up on stage.

——

The courtroom was momentarily abuzz with noise.

Many court ministers agreed with the Ministry of Justice official's idea. For a while, many of the officials knelt. All of them appealed to let Qi Min live for a few more days and dig out more information from him before letting him die.

The situation was very grave. The Hou Zhu was especially indecisive. Seeing the dissatisfied kneeling court ministers, he instantly gave an order: organize a thorough investigation on all officials related to Qi Min.

For a while, the crowd of officials dared not obey.

At this very moment, an official knelt down with a thump.

"Indeed, Your Majesty! Qi Min should be investigated, all others in the court that have had contact with Northern Liang deserve to die!" that official said. "But, this servant is worried. Your Majesty, please let this servant speak!"

All the officials looked over, and saw the one kneeling on the ground was a sixth rank official under Qi Min.

This official just passed the imperial examination a few years ago. Since entering the palace as an official, he had always worked under Qi Min. His relationship with Qi Min wasn't considered very close, but he still was virtually in the same faction.

For a while, silence reigned in the court. Everyone waited for his next words.

The Hou Zhu said, "By all means."

The official raised his eyes and looked around the court. He kowtowed, saying, "Letters were found in Qi Min's residence. Because it was all taken unaware, he was caught red-handed. If Your Majesty goes to arrest him now with much commotion, there will definitely be someone taking some precautions and destroying any incriminating evidence. By then, even if there are spies, it will be hard to look into."

The Hou Zhu found it reasonable.

He repeatedly nodded. "Then, what does aiqing* think?"

*aiqing – an affectionate term of address of a monarch toward a subject

The official grit his teeth, raised his head and said, "In the palace, Qi Min has several close colleagues and disciples. Even if this official does not mention this, Your Majesty must have been aware of this as well. What about sending imperial guards now to check these people's houses? All of us officials will remain in the hall and will not leave until the search has concluded."

For a while, the surrounding officials were greatly surprised.

What kind of approach was this? Treating all the courtiers like prisoners and detaining them in the same place, before dispatching troops to search the houses?

This was simply extremely absurd!

But everyone could tell, this boy was making a dangerous move. Knowing that Qi Min would fall, and he himself couldn’t get away from Qi Min, he sold Qi Min’s party in advance, turning the tables, ingratiating before the Hou Zhu.

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Chapter 83

For a while, the court ministers related to Qi Min all showed concern, and many glared daggers at this person, as if he was a traitor.

But joy painted Pang Shao's face.

He knew Qi Min's people weren't all clean. Even if the so-called colluding evidence wasn't seized, some vulnerable points could be discovered. He had fooled Qi Min, and used this chance to tear up his power by the roots. It was better to cut the weeds and dig up the roots, so as to avoid those people who still wanted to avenge Qi Min.

With this in mind, he stepped forward and said, "This servant also thinks so. The crime of colluding with the enemy cannot be looked down upon. Your Majesty, why not try this approach?"

The Hou Zhu, hearing that person's suggestion, was already tempted. Hearing Pang Shao agree, he said, "Then, let's go with aiqing's suggestion."

Immediately, Pang Shao smoothly recited the full names of several officials, all of whom always went against him, but whose vulnerabilities couldn't be caught.

But after he finished, that official who first made the suggestion commented, "Your Majesty, although Zhao Dunting-daren was the one who accused Qi Min, he's still Qi Min's pupil, and although he is always on friendly terms with Qi Min, he can't be left out."

Hearing that, Pang Shao impassively glanced at that person.

And saw that person looking up at the Hou Zhu, waiting for the Hou Zhu's instruction.

Pang Shao coldly laughed in his heart.

Truly a person so eager that he became brainless. He himself had already delivered his words, and he still had to interrupt. It seemed he had gone mad from wanting to make worthy contributions and lost his sense of propriety.

Anyway, there was no trace of his contacts with Zhao Dunting, and the only physical evidence was those several letters framing Qi Min, which had long been sent to Qi Min's residence. Even if an investigation was needed, Zhao Dunting was not afraid. After being checked along with the others, it would instead purge him of the suspicion of fabricating charges.

With this in mind, Pang Shao coldly looked at that official, and said:

"This official was careless and forgot Zhao-daren," he said. "Since they have a master and apprentice relationship, have him investigated along with the others."

——

The palace was thrown into chaos. The news was delivered to the prince's residence very quickly as well.

Jiang Suizhou watched as the situation gradually shifted to the direction of his plans, and his dangling heart gradually was laid down.

Toward sunset, the most significant news was sent in.

Letters were found in Zhao Dunting's residence.

They were actually Pang Shao's. The continuous letters, according to the words of Pang Shao's attendant, instructed Zhao Dunting how to frame Qi Min step by step, even telling him to send the letters Pang Shao had prepared over to Qi Min's study with the excuse of visiting the sick.

The letters were placed in the most hidden secret compartment in the room. All matters, step by step, all could be matched with the events of these days.

Zhao Dunting was filled with surprise seeing those letters, and immediately cried as if wronged. But with the ironclad evidence, he had no way to refute, and was imprisoned then and there, replacing Qi Min out.

Meanwhile, Pang Shao attempted to explain to the Hou Zhu, but the Hou Zhu did not bother to listen even a word: he lost his temper and had people drag Pang Shao out of the imperial palace.

Jiang Suizhou knew that since Pang Shao did not commit collusion, although he framed a court minister, he wouldn't really receive a substantive punishment.

However, the crack between him and the Hou Zhu would be more severe to the extent that it couldn't be healed.

This, to Pang Shao, was a loss more grave than being punished.

Jiang Suizhou breathed a sigh of relief and instructed Xu Du to rest up, then left his residence. He headed back to Anyin Hall.

When he passed the garden, he had the palanquin take a detour to the wine cellar in the prince's residence. After taking two jugs of fine wine, he left.

Such a great occasion, how could he not celebrate with wine?

When he returned to Anyin Hall, lamps had been lit up all around. He hugged the wine jugs as he stepped off the palanquin, and went straight into the main house. But his footsteps faltered.

He stood right in the middle of the courtyard, gazing northward, only to see the lights of Huo Wujiu's room passing through the window gauze, slightly flickering.

Jiang Suizhou's heart faintly stirred.

How could he drink this merry wine alone?

With this thought in mind, he turned on his feet and walked toward the light.

It had not been a day since Qi Min was thrown into the prison, when he was let out.

Even the Hou Zhu felt guilty toward this old pedant whom he hadn't liked since childhood. After he was released from the prison, he had him stay in the palace first. Only after consoling him with a few words did he let him go home.

When Qi Min arrived home, the streets were already lit with evening lights.

His whole family had been let out of the prison and had been waiting in front of the door to welcome him. His several good friends also waited in front of the residence. Seeing him get down from the carriage, they all came forward to congratulate him.

They just escaped from a crisis; it was a happy occasion. After Qi Min exchanged pleasantries with them one by one, he welcomed everyone into his residence, inviting them to stay and eat first before going back.

The officials naturally did not decline.

Qi Min set up a feast in the house, as if congratulating everyone. He was normally thrifty, and this time, after his house was searched, he also didn't bring many silvers out.

So this feast was prepared quite simply. However, everyone in the feast was his best and closest friends; all of them knew how he was.

The officials closed the doors and feasted. After everyone was full and delirious from the drinks, their talks gradually became open.

"Today in the courtroom, I found out what a shallow person is like," an official drunkenly said, holding a wine cup.

For a moment, everyone lost their voices, gradually quieting.

That official still continued, "Qi-daren has students everywhere. Those who are acquainted with him, aren't they seasoned scholars? But today, the one

who framed him, fanned the flames, and took advantage to plead innocence —of all people, it's his disciple whom he tutored!"

Although Qi Min had never been a teacher, scholars always placed importance in manners. If a student wanted to be an official, they had to pass the imperial examination, and the candidate who passed the imperial examination must always remember the kindness of the examiner who recognized their worth, so they should address their own examiner as 'teacher'.

And Qi Min had been the head examiner of the imperial examination for so many times already.

Hearing these words, silence fell.

After a moment, an official gulped down a glass of wine, and put the wine glass atop the table with a clang.

"Dunting…! Who would have thought, the one who did this is Zhao Dunting!"

The officials who were sitting all knew Zhao Dunting had been most filial to Qi Min. In those years, Zhao Dunting was impoverished. He sold his ancestors' residential land to enter the capital and take the imperial examination, and even suffered from being robbed by thieves outside the city. When he entered the capital, he was penniless. Qi Min came across him just then and helped him financially, so that he could remain in the capital and take the examination.

And, henceforth, Zhao Dunting repaid Qi Min day by day, and it was seen by all eyes.

Hearing these words, everyone's expressions at the feast became all the heavier. And Qi Min was silent for a long while. He picked up his chopsticks, grabbed some food, and brought it into his mouth.

"I've never taught him. He passed the imperial examination and serves for the imperial court. It's all his own skill and good luck," he said impassively.

“I don’t count as his teacher; what he did to me also does not count as a betrayal.”

For a while, everyone heaved a sigh.

Then someone continued, “Today’s matter is also good for Qi-gong*; we discerned certain people’s nature. It’s a blessing in disguise.”

*gong – respectful salutation for an elder

An official on the side praised, “That’s right. Zhang Yan, Qi Min’s subordinate who stubbornly wanted the emperor to thoroughly investigate Qi-daren’s relatives and friends, is a dark horse.”

All around, everyone nodded.

But saw Qi Min put down his chopsticks.

“He is not,” he said.

The official on the side was surprised. “What Qi-daren is saying is…?”

Then saw Qi Min fix his gaze on the small cup on the table, and slowly said:

“Today, he looked to be in trouble, but he didn’t forget to drag Zhao Dunting in. If not for him, I’d long been beheaded. This action of his, like knowing something in advance, was to save me.”

The feast sunk into silence.

“But I don’t know how he knows, and who is behind him.”

At this particular moment, an official slowly opened his mouth:

“Qi-daren, I’m somewhat friends with Zhang Yan. When drunk the other day, he told me something.”

Qi Min looked at him, and saw him slowly say:

“He said…he wants to handle a matter for His Highness Jingwang. Whether it’s life-threatening or not, he must do it.”

——

When evening came, Zhao residence was more or less seized.

The troops dispersed. Everyone in Zhao’s family was either arrested or dispersed. The thick and heavy gates were slowly shut and a seal was affixed.

The people going in and out of Zhao residence sank into a pitch dark quiet.

At this particular moment, a few shadows drifted out on the eaves very swiftly, like owls in the night, scurrying up the wall from the darkness. In a blink of an eye, it disappeared into the darkness again.

These were the rearguards of Xu Du’s death soldiers.

The shadows flashed a few times, and then plunged into the dark lane. Within half an incense stick, the lane was already empty. The several people in dark clothes had long vanished. Only several unnoticeable servants, wearing duan da*, carried groceries from the busy street, directly entering Jingwang Manor.

*duan da – a kind of ancient Chinese Hanfu, including top and trousers, made of coarse cloth worn by commoners or servants

And no one noticed, beside the lane where the people vanished, there was a seemingly endless cul-de-sac. Turn a corner there, walk a short distance, and the stench of blood could be smelled.

There were several people who quietly hid there. Below their feet lay about ten dead bodies, piled up into a small hill.

These dead bodies were precisely these people’s doing.

Inaudible footsteps came.

“They’re gone,” that person unhurriedly said, stopping before the dead bodies.

Then he saw those snake-like figures hanging on the wall move upon hearing these words. One of them landed down from the wall, tore off his mask, and walked up to the dead bodies, casually kicking them.

“It’s over,” he said. “The assassins Pang-laozei* sent were indeed rather skillful.”

*lao zei – derogatory term used for the old and immoral.

He then saw that person before who was on the lookout also tearing off his own mask.

It was Wei Kai.

“I still need to trouble you xiong di’s to clean these things,” he said, looking at those corpses. “You must not leave any trace.”

“Commander Wei, rest assured,” someone said at the side. “We will handle it, you just be at ease.”

After that, the people got busy in the dark.

The one who had spoken before said as he bustled about, “I don’t know what the General is thinking. I thought it was serious, even troubling Commander Wei.”

Someone at the side smiled. “Right. Look at this situation. Lao zi* was eager for a fight and even thought we were going to rescue the General from Jingwang Manor.”

*lao zi – “I” for the elderly, or used in anger, fun, or arrogantly

Then someone followed, “Who knew it would be secretly protecting a few dead soldiers. Commander Wei, do you know which family these dead soldiers belong to that are surprisingly so precious?”

But Wei Kai calmy reprimanded, “Stop gossiping, hurry up.”

The few of them laughed, and then no longer spoke as they deftly continued to work.

Wei Kai stood at the side, brows furrowed so tight.

It was not only his fellow xiong di’s who were puzzled; he did not know why either.

Jingwang wanted to oppose Pang Shao, he knew this much; Jingwang had finished this matter, he had also somewhat heard about it.

And the General had long asked him to prepare, had them hide discreetly in advance, waiting for Jiang Suizhou’s dead soldiers to withdraw.

Although the General predicted very accurately that there really were Pang Shao’s people coming here to investigate, and were killed clean by them, Wei Kai didn’t know why the General wanted to do such a superfluous thing.

Was it to kill these subordinates of Pang Shao, or was it because of Jingwang Manor’s dead soldiers? What was so special about them?

——

Jiang Suizhou’s two jugs of wine were the residence’s fine wines that had been stored for many years. The original owner seemed to extremely love to store these, but did not particularly drink. Many vintage wines from Ye Cheng were stored in the residence.

These were among them.

And Jiang Suizhou didn’t expect the wines of the northern area to be so strong.

He carried the wine jugs in his arms to Huo Wujiu’s room, and Huo Wujiu happened to have just finished his dinner.

Only when Jiang Suizhou saw him sitting on the bed did he remember he was still injured. He anxiously asked, “You’re still on medication. You can’t drink wine, can you?”

When Huo Wujiu raised his eyes to see him carrying the wine jugs, he asked, “Success?”

Jiang Suizhou naturally knew what he was talking about. He raised his hand to have the servants withdraw, and smiled. “Success. Everything was as planned.”

Huo Wujiu’s gaze stopped at his smiling expression, and didn’t move for a moment.

Then saw Jiang Suizhou place the wine jugs on the table, sat on the left, and said, “I thought to celebrate with you, but forgot your injury has not healed. But forget it, it doesn’t matter if we drink or not.”

But he heard Huo Wujiu repeat, “Celebrate with me?”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“In any case, Pang Shao has enmity with you. He has suffered a big loss. To you, it’s a joyous occasion.”

His words sounded rather pretentious. At this moment, the lights were dim, as if a little out of place.

He paused, one hand on the wine jug, his chin resting on the back of his hand, looking at Huo Wujiu, and candidly laughed.

“Also because there’s no one else. Very few know about this matter. Gu Changyun is unreliable, Xu Du is still busy. If ben wang doesn’t look for you to celebrate with, wouldn’t it be suffocating?”

At this moment, he was extremely relaxed. The pretense on his face was pretty much removed, revealing his lethargic and gentle look.

He saw Huo Wujiu stay silent, but his hands were agile. One hand pulled the wheelchair, and bracing down, he sat on the wheelchair and rolled directly to the table, stopping in front of Jiang Suizhou.

He didn’t speak, only opened the wine jug.

In the next moment, the alcoholic fragrant wafted about, flowing all over the room.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned for a moment, before hurriedly raising his hand to stop him.

“Can you drink or not? If you can’t, forget it, do not let your treatment time go to waste…”

But he saw Huo Wujiu raise his eyes, his dark eyes especially bright under the lights.

“The wine is already here, do you want to drink it or not?”

Jiang Suizhou thought his eyes right now were brimming with laughter.

Although it couldn’t be seen, the inkling couldn’t be grasped, they gleamed, like sunbeams flashing on the tip of a gun, illuminating his eyes. And, for a while, it made one rather light-headed.

He involuntarily took his hand away, letting Huo Wujiu skillfully hold up the wine jug with one hand as he easily grabbed two bowls, filling them up with wine.

Only until Huo Wujiu placed a bowl in front of him did he come back to his senses, dumbfounded.

The wine in the bowl was very cool. The wine gave off a rich fragrance—just smelling it was intoxicating. This bowl was also not small, and the lights illuminating the wine in the bowls were bright. For a moment, it made Jiang Suizhou shrink back a little.

Even before he crossed over, he had never seen anyone who used a bowl for white wine.

He dazedly looked at the bowls on the table, then raised his eyes to look at Huo Wujiu. He calmly said, “We’re using these to drink?”

He saw Huo Wujiu looking puzzled. “What else?”

Huo Wujiu reacted for a moment, before remembering the people in the capital seemed outmoded using bowls to drink wine, unlike in the frontier that always lacked supplies—there were not many garish cups, and the same bowl was used to both eat meat and drink wine.

He was chagrined for a while, feeling rustic.

“Forgot,” he said. “I’ll go find someone for cups.”

He was about to leave with his wheelchair, but saw Jiang Suizhou raise his eyes and stop him.

When he saw the look at Jingwang’s face, it seemed to reveal some ego that he didn’t want to show.

He gritted his teeth, and said, “Forget it. Today, Pang Shao got into the worst trouble ever, it’s worth ben wang to drink wine with a bowl.”

As Huo Wujiu watched as he grabbed the bowl, he suddenly remembered that day when he came back drunk, his whole body exuding the smell of sweet liquor. From the smell, it was clear it was not a strong one. This person most likely did not have good alcoholic tolerance.

He paused. He was about to say ‘stop’, but forcibly swallowed the word down.

He remembered that day when this person was unsteady on his feet and fell into his embrace.

It was filled with sweet osmanthus.

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Chapter 84

It had never occurred to Huo Wujiu that Jiang Suizhou would be troublesome after drinking too much.

With just half a jar of wine down, Jiang Suizhou was drunk, and began to chatter more.

He seemed to be quite proud of today's events and rambled on, telling Huo Wujiu all about the arrangements he made these past few days. As he became more and more intoxicated, his memory also deteriorated. He began to repeat the words he uttered over and over in a circle.

Although he kept rambling on, his voice remained gentle and slow. It clearly echoed with drunkenness, but it was like a warm wind blowing across his face with an unflinching tenderness.

Huo Wujiu responded patiently from the side, seeing him gradually begin to stagger and talk incoherently.

Knowing that he had to return in a while, Huo Wujiu regretted not changing the glass for him just now. When pouring wine, he had a sense of propriety.

However, it was soon discovered by Jiang Suizhou.

His eyes were hazy and a tad teary when he pointed to the two wine bowls on the table.

"It's unfair, don't you think?" he asked.

The bowl in front of Huo Wujiu was full, while the bowl in front of Jiang Suizhou was only perfunctorily filled.

Huo Wujiu fooled him, “This is left over from what you drank just now.”

He watched as Jiang Suizhou stared at the bowl for a long time. He seemed to have thought of something and smiled intoxicatedly.

“I forgot,” he drawled, “Excuse me, I’m being rude.”

Then before Huo Wujiu could stop him, he picked up the wine on the table and drank it all in one go.

Huo Wujiu’s eyebrows jumped involuntarily.

He was so easily fooled and so honest. If he were to drink with others outside, wouldn’t he be easily taken advantage of?

Seeing that his wine bowl was empty, Huo Wujiu poured a little for him again, still only a little, enough to only fill the bottom of the bowl.

Jiang Suizhou uttered a couple more lines, then heaved a puzzled sigh at the sight of his bowl.

“Didn’t I finish my drink just now?” he wondered.

With that, he reached out to take the bowl.

Huo Wujiu hurriedly reached out and pressed his wrist, taking the jade bowl out of his hand and placing it farther away.

“Tell me, how did Zhao Dunting weep in front of Jiang Shunheng?” He changed the subject.

“Ah.” Jiang Suizhou immediately threw the wine bowl to the back of his mind with a tinge of smile on his face.

“A court minister said he kneeled before His Majesty, just kneeled down and began to cry. His tears rained down the moment he spoke, startling the Emperor into thinking that someone in his family died.”

Saying that, he beamed with joy and continued.

“He just considers himself a good actor, and thinks he did everything under wraps. He thought nobody could catch his handle, did he? He doesn’t know, the mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind…”

This was the third or fourth time Huo Wujiu had heard this line tonight.

He had never been a patient person. When his subordinates reported to him, they had to deliberate well in advance, for fear of not being concise enough and annoying him.

But to his surprise, he enjoyed listening to Jiang Suizhou’s rhetoric.

Jingwang was so drunk that he forgot all his disguises and revealed the gentle and light lining beneath his fox’s skin. Or maybe he had a pleasant voice. Unlike others, he was always like a lecturing teacher. With the unique leisurely manner of those scholars, Jiang Suizhou made Huo Wujiu feel pleasantly comfortable.

Or perhaps it was…

Jiang Suizhou was genuinely happy, that was why his eyes were glowing, making him especially enjoyable to watch.

Huo Wujiu unknowingly drank all the remaining wine.

They didn’t stop even when the moon was hanging on the branches and the lanterns outside were all out. Even though Huo Wujiu repeatedly controlled everything, Jiang Suizhou still felt completely drunk. His arm was on the table and his head was buried in his elbow, only revealing a pair of watery eyes, hazily looking at Huo Wujiu.

He did not speak, only stared at him quietly.

Huo Wujiu’s throat rolled inaudibly, so he picked up the wine bowl on the table and tilted his head back. The contents were gulped down in one go.

Then he heard Jiang Suizhou’s languid voice, with a touch of sincere smile.

“How nice, Huo Wujiu,” he muttered.

Huo Wu Jiu looked at him.

He saw Jiang Suizhou close his eyes and bury his face in the crook of his arm, like a little animal looking for a place to sleep in its nest.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve had anyone to talk to.” His voice was almost a murmur. “I’ve been lonely as hell, and I’m glad I have you.”

——

Pang Shao’s residence was brightly lit, until the third watch.

Pang Shao stood under the porch with his hands behind his back. The green calyx plum blossoms in the courtyard were blooming like clouds and mists on the top of the mountain. With the red lanterns’ illumination, they somewhat shone warmly.

“Nobody’s back yet?” Pang Shao looked down at the man kneeling in front of him and asked unhurriedly.

The subordinate knelt in front of him, not even daring to raise his head.

“This subordinate is incompetent!” The man said. “I have already sent someone to look for them again, and I will definitely be able to get the brothers back in line tonight!”

Pang Shao stared at him, and after a moment, he sneered.

“You are indeed incompetent.” He said, “But I think those people are even more incompetent.”

That subordinate’s body shook.

Then he heard Pang Shao slowly let out a breath and said.

“There is no need to search for them.” He continued, “By this hour, those who can come back would have returned long ago.”

That subordinate buried his head even lower.

“Go and collect your own punishment,” Pang Shao instructed, turned around and went into the room.

Only the subordinate was left kowtowing at the bottom of the stairs: “Thank you for the great reward, thank you for the great reward!”

The door of the room opened. The bright light shone on him for a moment, and then with the closed doorway, left him in the darkness.

And in the room, several of Pang party officials stood in front of their seats, looking at Pang Shao.

They watched as Pang Shao sat in the main seat.

“How capable.” He commented, “I’ve never seen such a capable person before. Today, it broadened my horizons.”

An official next to him hurriedly stepped forward and asked, “Chief Minister, wasn’t there a single survivor from the assassins under you?”

Pang Shao did not speak.

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Chapter 85

Seeing his acquiescence, the man circled around a few times and said hesitantly, “That’s impossible! Your Excellency, we are all aware of your assassins’ skills. They have never failed, and yet all of them were lost this time. It is … who could it be?!”

Pang Shao smiled and stared intently at the candle flame flickering on the table.

“It’s not all useless.” He said, “At least it confirms my suspicion, proving that someone has long been watching Zhao Dunting and has tampered with his house.”

Another official next to him said, “But without catching someone, there’s no way to confirm who did it! Today’s incident, everything fell flawlessly into place. The person who directed this, however, remains hidden behind, making us unable to find a trace.”

Pang Shao remained silent for a long time, and his hand fell on the tea lamp on the table.

“Speculation does not require evidence.” He said, “It’s enough for me to know deep inside who it is.”

His fingers slowly played with the lid of the tea marigold. He turned his head sideways, and his gaze fell on the south side.

That was the direction of Qinghe Lane.

“Who started to add fuel to the flames, who ultimately felt complacent, and who secretly competed with me and made a tie with me, and who fought

with me secretly, and kept me in check… It's all clear to me," he stated slowly.

His voice sounded calm, and there wasn't a trace of gnashed teeth at all, but it made the people around feel chills creeping up their spines.

When everyone heard what he said, they all knew that he did not intend to name someone explicitly.

No one dared to ask. Only one official stepped forward cautiously and changed the subject: "Yes, Chief Minister's heart is like a mirror, so these lowly officials can feel at ease. But, on His Majesty's side… What can we do? "

The Emperor threw such a big tantrum towards the Chief Minister today, and all civil and military officials of the dynasty knew it.

The Emperor didn't even call him uncle today, and for the first time in history, he called the Chief Minister directly by his first name.

Everyone knew that the Chief Minister was so illustrious and majestic now, but his status all depended on the one sitting on the throne who had always accepted whatever he advised.

Pang Shao sneered, picked up the tea cup and lifted the lid.

"What happened today was that Zhao Dunting quarreled with Qi Min. When he harmed him, he borrowed my name and tried to plant the blame on me in vain. That's all. As for how to tell His Majesty, do you need me to teach you?"

Several officials bowed and saluted him, indicating that they understood what to do.

Pang Shao lowered his eyes and took a sip of tea.

After just one sip, he put down the cup of tea and looked quietly at the tea swirling in the cup with downcast eyes.

“The first-rate Mingqian Longjing is spoiled without rhyme or reason,” he said.

A servant quickly approached his side in response.

Pang Shao put the tea cup on the table with a clang.

“Go ask who prepared it,” he ordered lightly.

“If you spoil such good tea, you should pay with your life.”

——

After Jiang Suizhou got drunk, he slumped on the table and didn’t get up.

Huo Wujiu swung his wheelchair to his side, reached out and held his arm to help him up. Jiang Suizhou couldn’t open his eyes, and definitely had no strength to carry himself, so he fell towards Huo Wujiu due to the latter’s force.

Jiang Suizhou went from lying on the table to leaning on Huo Wujiu’s arm.

Huo Wujiu felt as if struck in his acupoints, freezing in place for a while. His arm went numb all the way up, and the left side of his heart all but lost consciousness.

He initially intended to call Meng Qianshan in, but all the words got stuck in his throat.

After some unknown time, he slowly lowered his head and gazed at Jiang Suizhou, who was leaning in his arms.

The lamp light illuminated his eyelashes with a seemingly golden glow, and his lips were stained with strong wine, glistening with moisture.

Huo Wujiu’s throat rolled up and down.

Just then, Jiang Suizhou, who was leaning on his arm, seemed to feel uncomfortable. He moved and plunged straight into Huo Wujiu’s arms. An

unconscious low hum emerged from his throat and gently fell into Huo Wujiu’s ear.

Huo Wujiu’s ears burned.

A flame rushed from his originally numb heart like magic and fiercely burned straight into his brain.

With a bang, a certain string seemingly ignited.

Two points of force seeped out of Huo Wujiu’s hand that was holding Jiang Suizhou’s arm, and it trembled imperceptibly.

He realized one thing clearly.

Jiang Suizhou indeed bore no improper thoughts towards him, but he seemed to…

He stared closely at Jiang Suizhou.

He seemed to have dirty thoughts about Jiang Suizhou at some point.

He had been among men since he was a child, fighting and making trouble, so he was certain he sure he should be more than a little disgusted with such thoughts. However, in his heart, he was now left with only a dawning nearness to home.

He had never had any particular interest, and had always been indifferent to everything.

He had never had such a raging desire for monogamy and overwhelming fondness. These emotions sprouted so fiercely and it made him cringe in disbelief. This confusion gave birth to fear.

It turned out that people could become cowards before the person they love so dearly.

He lowered his head, quietly gazing at the man. Under the light, Huo Wujiu seemed to become a sculpture, not daring to move a muscle.

Huo Wujiu stayed in such a posture until Jiang Suizhou stirred in his arms.

Huo Wujiu seemingly reacted, but it was already too late. He looked up at the door, moved his lips, but made no sound.

He had never read books of sages and men of virtue, nor did he understand what it meant by taking unfair advantage in a dark chamber. No one had taught him that where there was no one, he should restrain his instincts and make the choices he should make.

The evil dragon wanted to guard his treasure tonight.

He withdrew his gaze and tightened his hold, directly bringing the man into his arms. He leaned forward a bit, carried Jiang Suizhou straight up, and stood up from his wheelchair.

He was only now able to stand on his feet, thus he walked strenuously.

Nevertheless, he slowly but steadily carried Jiang Suizhou and walked to the bed where he laid him down on his own bed.

The moment Jiang Suizhou landed on the pillow, he opened his eyes hazily.

Seeing that it was Huo Wuju, a rather slow smile stretched on his face.

“Huo Wujiu.” His voice rang softly, and almost only his lips moved.

“I won’t let you kill me.” He was so intoxicated long ago that he actually blurted out his heartfelt words to Huo Wujiu.

But due to the rubbing of clothes and silk together, Huo Wujiu only heard the head and tail.

“Huo Wujiu, I won’t let you die,” he heard Jiang Suizhou mutter.

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Chapter 86

When Jiang Suizhou woke up the next day, he saw an unfamiliar beam.

He was about to turn over and sit up, but felt a splitting headache. The slightest movement made him dizzy.

He frowned and rested on the bed for a moment, and then slowly sat up until his vision was no longer spinning round.

Then he realized that it was bright everywhere. There was some familiarity in the strangeness. He was in Huo Wujiu's room.

This is…?

Jiang Suizhou felt disoriented for a while. He held his forehead for a considerable time before he regained some memories.

He had been drinking at Huo Wujiu's place last night. The wine was strong, but his health was poor. Hence, halfway through the drink, he passed out drunk.

This time, no matter how hard he thought, he couldn't recall what happened after.

So … did he sleep with Huo Wujiu last night and took up his bed?

Jiang Suizhou still felt light-headed when he heard the bedroom door open. It was Huo Wujiu, who had washed himself clean with clear moisture on his face. He rolled his wheelchair and entered.

"Are you awake?" He heard Huo Wujiu ask.

Jiang Suizhou looked up at him and saw the clear and fresh looking Huo Wujiu. Although the latter was poker-faced, he was sitting upright in his wheelchair. He, on the other hand, was leaning on the bed and leaning weakly against the headboard. Something was quite wrong with the atmosphere.

“I drank so much last night that I didn’t know I spent the night with you,” Jiang Suizhou said, rubbing his forehead with one hand.

Huo Wujiu gingerly glanced at him and replied, “It’s okay.”

Then, he swung his wheelchair to the outer room and called Meng Qianshan in loudly.

Meng Qianshan had been standing outside all night. Upon hearing Huo Wujiu’s call, he quickly pushed in the door, and asked for someone to bring in the sobering tea that he had prepared earlier.

He waited on Jiang Suizhou as he drank the sobering tea. Finally, Jiang Suizhou didn’t feel dizzy anymore. Jiang Suizhou got up and changed his robe. He saw Li Changning with Wei Kai coming in from outside.

The two were both stunned to see him sitting on Huo Wujiu’s bed and drinking tea. Li Changning promptly bowed his head and feigned ignorance to his presence, not forgetting to motion to Wei Kai who was following behind him, staring outrightly at Jiang Suizhou.

“This lowly servant went to the main house earlier but didn’t see Your Highness. I didn’t expect that Your Highness is actually here with Madam,” Li Changning stepped forward and bowed.

Jiang Suizhou gently hummed and replied, “It doesn’t matter. If there is no adjustment to the dosage of decoction today, just ask someone to boil it as written.”

Li Changning responded.

Meng Qianshan helped Jiang Suizhou up, but when he got up, dizziness struck his head, and he almost lost his footing.

He thought to himself, *I need to go back and catch up on my sleep.*

He raised his hand and ordered, “Do what you have to do. This Prince is leaving.”

The two men hurriedly sent Jiang Suizhou off at the side.

Jiang Suizhou nodded at Huo Wujiu and turned to go.

Jiang Suizhou moved sluggishly, and he walked out with a fluttering pace. Once the door of the room closed from the outside, only three of them remained in the room.

Wei Kai raised his head to look out alertly without delay and watched as Jiang Suizhou walked farther away before glancing back at Huo Wujiu. His eyes were wide open: “General, he’s…!”

Huo Wugou glanced at him faintly and could work out what the kid was thinking.

He frowned and said, “Don’t think nonsense.”

Only when Wei Kai heard this from him did he hastily let out a sigh of relief.

Although he was inexperienced, alarms still kept ringing in his heart when he looked at Jingwang’s appearance.

How could he spend the night at the General’s place and look a little bit weaker than usual? Could it be that something happened between him and the General last night?

But fortunately, since the General told him not to think of nonsensical matters, then he could set his mind to rest.

Wei Kai had been on edge for a long time, but at this moment, he finally breathed in relief. He no longer watched his language and blurted out, “This subordinate understands! What kind of person is the General? How can you be like him!”

As he stated that, he raised his eyes and looked at his general with shining eyes.

However, when he met his General’s eyes, Wei Kai suddenly felt cold all over.

When Wei Kai was feeling disconcerted, the general frowned and said coldly, “Keep your mouth shut.”

Wei Kai hurriedly shut his mouth and nodded.

The General stopped looking at him. He stood up from his wheelchair and walked slowly to the bedside. He stepped aside with a wink, took out the medicine bag that Li Changning brought, and boiled the medicine for Huo Wujiu.

Wei Kai was more than aware that he had just said something wrong and made the General angry.

It was just that …

He was puzzled.

He hadn’t said anything wrong just now, so what was the General angry about?

In the main room of Anyin Hall, Meng Qianshan supported Jiang Suizhou as he slowly lay down on the bed.

He was used to sleeping on his own bed, and he didn’t expect Huo Wujiu’s bed to be so hard. It made his back ache all night. Meng Qianshan waited for him to eat something before lowering the bed curtains and allowing him to go back to sleep.

Jiang Suizhou still couldn’t figure it out.

He pondered for a long time, but still had to ask, “How did I fall asleep there yesterday?”

Meng Qianshan replied when he heard his question, “Ow, Your Highness, how could this servant know? Yesterday, this servant kept watch along the corridor until the third watch when Madam came to the door and said that you wanted to sleep there.”

Jiang Suizhou frowned: “Madam Huo said so?”

Meng Qianshan nodded.

“Doesn’t Your Highness remember?”

Jiang Suizhou replied with a faint hum. After a moment, he said, “I drank too much. Indeed I don’t remember much.”

Meng Qianshan hummed in response.

He heard Jiang Suizhou pause and then say, “It’s just…”

Meng Qianshan prodded, “Just what?”

Jiang Suizhou frowned and pondered.

Hearing Meng Qianshan’s answer, it seemed like Jiang Suizhou had asked to stay there on his own initiative, but he couldn’t remember saying such words. Instead, he remembered brief moments. It seemed like someone carried him over and put him on the bed.

But that memory was like a dream. The more he thought about it, the more his head hurt, so he simply rubbed his temples and said softly, “Forget it, it’s nothing.”

It must be a hallucination, Jiang Suizhou thought to himself. Huo Wujiu’s legs were still disabled. And even if they weren’t, why would he carry him?

———

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Chapter 87

Even though it was confirmed that Jiang Suizhou was seriously ill, Jiang Shunheng still didn’t take it lightly. Every once in a while, he would send imperial doctors to check on Jiang Suizhou’s condition.

The potency of Gu Changyun’s medicine was quite good. Whenever the effect of the medicine struck, it was like a mountain crumbling down, driving the doctors and imperial doctors in the mansion to a loss. When the efficacy of the drug subsided, it would also dwindle little by little until it maintained a state that made his body and pulse look weaker than before, but allowed him to still go about his daily life.

Therefore, for a period of time, even the highly skilled imperial doctors that the Hou Zhu sent to Jiang Suizhou still couldn’t diagnose him.

In the past few days, the imperial doctor went back and told the Hou Zhu that although His Highness Jingwang had recovered from his illness, his health was seriously damaged. Presently, the manor was keeping around a doctor from an unknown place to help him recuperate.

Nonetheless, there had been little results so far.

Hearing this news, the Hou Zhu was overjoyed.

“It’s really urgent to seek medical treatment,” the Hou Zhu commented slouchingly.

The imperial doctor agreed repeatedly.

Then he heard the Hou Zhu say, “Since he’s almost well, it is time to bring him into the palace for me to see. I can also persuade him that there are all

kinds of doctors in the Imperial Hospital he can ask for, so why trust wild foxes outside?”

The eunuch on the side knowingly stepped forward with a smile and asked the Hou Zhu when to invite Jingwang to enter the palace, so that he could deliver the decree.

The Hou Zhu had been in a terrible mood for some time and wanted to have some fun.

He wanted to see how sick Jiang Suizhou was and speculate when the sick kid would probably die. This was his greatest pleasure.

So, within two days, Jiang Suizhou entered the palace.

Under the drug’s efficacy, his body became frail. Because he was seriously drunk two days ago, his complexion hadn’t recovered. Therefore, when he entered the palace, he looked a little weaker than usual.

The Prince’s imperial crown was dense black, thick and wide, graceful and winding, but it rendered his cheeks seemingly thinner and his face pale. When he kneeled to salute, he looked shaky. It seemed that he could tumble without being pushed.

His appearance resembled his witch imperial consort mother’s dying look.

The former Emperor collapsed on the way to the south, and that witch imperial concubine also fell ill on the way. The moment the former Emperor died, the Hou Zhu immediately ordered that witch concubine to be imprisoned, and allowed no one to serve her, let alone an imperial doctor to treat her. Before she died, the Hou Zhu once went to see the bewitching face. She was skin and bones; her eyes were sunken, her skin was blue and white, and gone were the days when she looked pampered and proud of herself. The contrast was simply like heaven and earth.

The Hou Zhu really felt ecstatic at the sight of her.

Now, the son she gave birth to was very likely to follow in her footsteps.

The Hou Zhu was so elated that he strangely showed concern for Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou had known that there would be such a day, and had prepared for it before entering the palace. He merely put on a sickly look and replied perfunctorily.

As expected, his appearance greatly pleased the Hou Zhu.

Only when the Hou Zhu was pleased would he let Jiang Suizhou go ahead of time. Before noon, the Hou Zhu was in a festive mood and raised his hand to let Jiang Suizhou withdraw.

Jiang Suizhou got up and was about to salute, when he heard the Hou Zhu speak again.

“Since Fifth Brother is feeling better, why don’t you go back to your duty at the Ministry of Rites?” He smiled and said, “Without you in the Ministry of Rites, I feel uneasy.”

Uneasy my ass.

He only held a casual job in the Ministry of Rites. It made no difference whether he was there or not. The Hou Zhu said so only because Jiang Suizhou was in poor health and his face was unsightly. The former deliberately asked him to return to work, hoping to make him lose a few years of life due to fatigue.

Fortunately, this was exactly what Jiang Suizhou wanted.

He and Pang Shao parried to and fro, which also made Pang Shao suffer several major losses. Afterward, Pang Shao would definitely no longer let his guard down easily. If Jiang Suizhou was present in the court, he would be better informed.

Jiang Suizhou figured things out. He feigned difficulty, vainly excused himself, and finally, under the coercive order of the Hou Zhu, reluctantly agreed to end his leave.

The Hou Zhu was even more ecstatic.

Jiang Suizhou then stepped back, and when he left the hall, he caught sight of the Hou Zhu's satisfied expression out of the corner of his eye, his legs upturned on the table.

Jiang Suizhou gingerly withdrew his gaze.

Empress Dowager Pang's eyes were indeed short-sighted. She truly came from the same family as Pang Shao. She incessantly taught her son how to hate the concubines competing with her and how to kill his brothers for fun. However, it never crossed her mind to teach her son how to be a qualified emperor.

Only when the dynasty was passed down for thousands of generations, and only when the current dynasty had Pang Shao's support could they rest assured.

They seriously had only themselves to blame.

Jiang Suizhou pondered while walking outside the main hall. The sun was rising. He needed to rush out of the palace early, and also needed to go back to find Xu Du and Gu Changyun to do some planning.

But at this time, he met a person in front of the wide square in front of the hall head on.

The man was striding over in his direction. He should be returning to the main hall where the Hou Zhu was. A servant was trotting along his side, trying bitterly to persuade him.

"Chief Minister, Chief Minister, please stop. His Majesty is busy at this moment. I'm afraid he doesn't have time to see you…"

Jiang Suizhou's footsteps lurched, his body tensed with alertness.

Approaching head-on was Pang Shao.

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Chapter 88

This was the second time that Jiang Suizhou came face to face with Pang Shao after transmigrating.

Although he had exchanged several moves with Pang Shao, and now the latter could be called an old acquaintance, Jiang Suizhou also knew it was merely his luck in taking the lead because he came from the future.

The person in front of him was a tough nut to crack.

He stared at Pang Shao from afar, took a deep breath, forced himself to stabilize his mind, and slowly approached him.

When there were only three or five steps left between the two, Jiang Suizhou stopped and looked at Pang Shao from a higher position under the sun. The corners of his lips slightly hooked with a couple of smiles.

He watched as Pang Shao bowed gently and saluted him.

“This minister greets Your Highness Jingwang,” Pang Shao said.

Jiang Suizhou regarded him for a moment with a soft smile. It wasn’t until the inner servant on the side showed a look of panic did he slowly reply, “Chief Minister, you’re being polite.”

Pang Shao straightened up.

Jiang Suizhou looked him up and down, and said meaningfully, “Why did Pang-daren come into the palace today? Did His Majesty summon you?”

Pang Shao replied warmly, “To answer Your Highness, I have some trivial matters to report to His Majesty.”

He heard Jiang Suizhou answer with laughter: “What else is going on between the Chief Minister and my Imperial Brother? You shouldn’t have come here in vain. I’m afraid my Imperial Brother doesn’t want to see you.”

Pang Shao raised his eyes to look at Jiang Suizhou. He caught Jiang Suizhou staring at him, revealing an unconcealed, gloating smile.

“Although I have been ill in my house these days, I have heard something about the Chief Minister.” His tone rang gently but with a certain degree of undisguised pride, “Chief Minister, you are a good player, but there are times when you miss.”

Pang Shao forced a laugh and replied, “Your Highness must be laughing at me.”

In front of him, Jiang Suizhou’s hand hidden in his sleeve was already covered with a thin layer of sweat.

He knew that he must reluctantly show this appearance in order to dispel Pang Shao’s doubts and make him feel that he was just taking pleasure in his misfortune and not the initiator of the matter. Only in this way, Pang Shao would not deal with him immediately. With his current strength, it would be a challenge to compete head-on with Pang Shao.

Thinking inwardly at railway speed, Jiang Suizhou smiled and said, “Thank you, Chief Minister. As a matter of fact, I’ve almost recovered after hearing this good turn.”

Pang Shao echoed breezily, “That also counts as a meritorious service to this minister.”

Jiang Suizhou smiled and nodded, then he turned sideways and raised his hand in an inviting gesture.

“Then, Chief Minister, leave for now.” He said, “I’m afraid my Imperial Brother will be angry with you for a while, so you shouldn’t delay here.”

Pang Shao smiled, bowed and gave him a salute before lifting his legs and walking away.

Jiang Suizhou gave him a sideway glance and also walked straight to the outside of the palace.

The hands in his sleeves were shaking uncontrollably.

The man in front of him looked the most amiable and upright, but Jiang Suizhou knew that under this guise, he was the sharpest and cruelest soul.

Jiang Suizhou pressed his footsteps and walked forward step by step.

Behind him, Pang Shao, who was ten paces away, turned around and gave Jiang Suizhou an obscure glance.

Jiang Suizhou walked farther away.

He's different from what I've expected, Pang Shao inwardly murmured.

Pang Shao was convinced that Jiang Suizhou was responsible for Zhao Dunting's case from the day the incident happened. He immediately sent people to Zhao Dunting's house to search for traces, but the group of people were all wiped out. Even their corpses had disappeared.

Pang Shao monitored Jingwang Manor all year round. Although he couldn't reach Jingwang's courtyard, he was well aware that he lacked such great ability. After all, he spent fortunes cultivating his shadow guards beneath his manor. Jingwang wasn't rich enough, and was constrained by others everywhere. Even cultivating a few dead soldiers was as difficult as climbing up to heaven, let alone contending with his shadow guards.

But he also knew that this matter seemed to be pushing the boat with the current, but in fact caused a rift between him and the Emperor. The biggest beneficiary was also Jingwang.

Therefore, he simply assumed that he was negligent.

But from Jingwang's appearance just now, Pang Shao's heart was somewhat shaken again.

He had watched Jingwang grow up and knew that he wasn't that shrewd. He killed his shadow guards and acted as if nothing had happened in front of him. There wasn't the least bit of clue from his appearance.

When the servant next to Pang Shao saw him stop, he hurriedly asked, "Chief Minister?"

Pang Shao paused in his steps and said indifferently, "It's nothing."

Then he turned his head and proceeded to the main hall.

He hated guessworks, and despised the things that eluded him even more.

His best bet to deal with these people and things was to exterminate them by mistake instead of letting a single one off.

——

Since Huo Wujiu was able to stand up, his health improved day by day. In just a few days, he was able to move around freely.

Wei Kai was so excited that he burst into tears.

After administering acupuncture and medicine that day, the two men closed all the doors and windows of Huo Wujiu's room securely and had him walk back and forth in the room several times.

"It won't take long for General's leg to heal!" Li Changning exclaimed happily. "After that, I only need to prescribe some tonic medicine to warm your meridians every day, and in a month or so, you will be able to ride horses and use qinggong!"

Huo Wujiu looked down at his legs and responded with a faint hum.

Li Changning then turned around and went to pack his medical kit.

Wei Kai stepped forward and whispered to Huo Wujiu, “My Lord, our brothers outside received news from the Great Liang.”

Huo Wujiu abruptly raised his eyes.

“Speak.”

Wei Kai whispered quickly, “Our flying pigeons have contacted the General guarding the north bank of the Great River, and that man has said that he will greet you on the river any day you make the move. As long as our brothers can escort you to the river, he will make arrangements for everything after that.”

After Wei Kai said that, he laughed, “As long as your legs fully recover, how could anyone catch you again? Besides, they all think you’re disabled, so if they are caught unaware, we’ll be able to succeed in one fell swoop.”

Huo Wujiu fell silent for a moment, but asked, “The General guarding the north bank of the river? Where is Wu Qianfan?”

The one who was guarding Jiangbei was Wu Qianfan, who was adopted by the old marquis together along with Wei Kai.

Wei Kai paused, and his smile gradually faded.

“Qianfan… he’s gone,” he said.

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Chapter 89

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and saw Wei Kai pursing his lips. A moment later, he whispered, “That person said that Qianfan was shot by a stray arrow on the day you crossed the river. He couldn’t be saved.”

His eyes reddened a bit.

He and Wu Qianfan grew up together since childhood. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that they were brothers despite the lack of blood ties. After he crossed the river with the General and the General got captured, he complained about Wu Qianfan because he screwed up. Unexpectedly, it was because he was already dead.

Huo Wujiu, however, fell into silence.

Dead?

Wu Qianfan was his strongest subordinate, and his relationship to him was even closer than Wei Kai. When this man had perished, he should naturally be sad, but…

Before today, he already had some conjectures.

If Wu Qianfan was executed because of poor command, it would be justifiable. But the Great River was as wide as could be, so even if they were engaged in a bloody battle on the riverside, it was impossible to shoot arrows across the river. If Wu Qianfan was shot to death by an arrow, then it was likely when he was in the process of leading his troops across the river.

But if that were the case, it was unlikely that not a single soldier arrived.

So, if Wu Qianfan died accidentally … it must be that he was silenced.

Because if he were executed, he certainly would have been detained for interrogation, and the only way to keep him from spilling the beans was to let him die accidentally.

After a moment of silence, Huo Wujiu asked, “Who is now guarding Jiangbei?”

Wei Kai answered, “His surname is Li, and first name is Sheng, a former subordinate of His Highness the Crown Prince. I am not familiar with him.”

It wasn’t surprising that his people died and were replaced by the Crown Prince’s people. After all, he was no longer in the Great Liang now, so it was only natural for the Crown Prince to personally dispatch the army and appoint generals. They should also be people he was more familiar with and those whose capabilities he was more aware of.

However…

If Huo Wujiu hadn’t seen the fake letter with the Crown Prince’s personal seal from Jiang Suizhou that day, perhaps he would still think so.

Huo Wujiu remained silent for a while.

Even if his cousin had no problem, there must be something wrong with his cousin’s men. This being the case, the General guarding the river wasn’t completely a trustworthy person.

Based on his character, once he found such a problem, he would have gone forward to face the issue without fear.

When all was said and done, the general of the army guarding the river had just changed, nothing more. Even if he retreated ten thousand steps, but that general was bent on guarding the river bank and killing him, he had to weigh who the soldiers under his command supported. As to who would die at that time, that remained unknown.

On the contrary, as long as he prepared in advance, the time when that person wanted to deal with him most would also be the time when he would

most likely turn things around and obtain evidence to strike back.

But…

Although his eyes were fixed only on his knees, his mind was thinking of another person.

That man had begged for his asylum in the name of cooperation. If he were to escape alone, the man would surely bear the crime of releasing a captive for him. Also, if he were to take that man away…

On the one hand, he was weak and knew nothing about martial arts, so it would be difficult to protect him in front of two armies before a battle. On the other hand, as a member of the Southern Jing royal family, how was he supposed to deal with him after rashly bringing him back to Northern Liang?

The pampered young prince naturally couldn't be a captive.

Huo Wujiu had always chosen the most direct and easiest way to succeed. As for the consequences and risks, he never paid attention to them.

It never occurred to him that he would one day be indecisive, looking ahead into the future and back into the past.

He wanted to give up that easiest shortcut all for the sake of one person.

When Wei Kai heard nothing from his general for quite some time, he could not help being puzzled: "General?"

He knew that the General would definitely be sad after knowing that Wu Qianfan died. But grief aside, they must also focus on the situation at hand. Now that they had finally made contact with the guard of the Great Liang, what was the General still hesitating about?

Just then, Huo Wujiu, who had been silent for a long time, slowly spoke.

"Wait for the time being," he said. "Don't disclose anything about my leg being cured. Tell them it's not healed, but keep in touch with them. Send the

contents of each letter exchanged for my review, and I will reply.”

Wei Kai was dumbfounded.

“General?”

Their General seemed to have heard something and raised his eyes to look out the window.

Then he spotted the guard of His Highness Jingwang appearing far outside the entrance of Anyin Hall, followed by Jingwang in heavy coronet stepping down from the carriage.

The general took a couple of glances and went straight to the bedside. He neatly flipped over the bed covers and pulled the quilt upward. The man who was still walking as if on wings just now could no longer move his legs and was sickly sitting on the bed.

He also picked up the booklet by the bed with one hand and flipped through it.

“Jingwang is coming. Pack up your things and get out of here,” he commanded.

Wei Kai took two steps forward, keeping in mind that he couldn’t manage anything else: “But General, why are you…”

“Because I want to take someone away with me.”

He heard his general say this.

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Chapter 90

When Jiang Suizhou stepped into Huo Wujiu's room, he saw him sitting on the bed reading a book.

When he entered the room, Meng Qianshan discerningly took off his cloak and withdrew.

Jiang Suizhou walked straight into Huo Wujiu's bedroom and sat down by his bed. Huo Wujiu had just put down the book in his hand when he saw Jiang Suizhou sitting there looking at him.

"What?" Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou frowned and replied, "I just think they've treated you for so long, but you still don't look well."

Huo Wujiu paused and skirted around the topic.

"Did Jiang Shunheng summon you to the palace?" he asked.

Jiang Suizhou smiled at his question. He took Huo Wujiu's book and casually flipped through it.

"Hmm," he replied smilingly, "Recently, the imperial doctors who entered the manor has never stopped. I've recovered somewhat these days, so naturally, he wants to confirm with his own eyes whether I'm dead or not."

After saying that, he looked down at the book, unable to resist releasing a soft sigh.

Before he transmigrated, he was in good health and never knew what it was like to be a sick child. After staying here for so many days, although he had

tried his best to change the fate of being killed by Huo Wujiu, he also knew that his naturally frail body would never get better.

His lifespan perhaps was still uncertain.

But just then, he heard Huo Wujiu's voice.

"I won't let anything happen to you," he promised.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and saw Huo Wujiu looking at him quite seriously He burst out laughing.

"That's for sure," he said. "With General Huo protecting this Prince, I believe that even if Jiang Shunheng was old friends with King Yama, there was no way he could take my life."

He just thought Huo Wujiu was kidding and he didn't take him seriously —— After all, it was all too easy not to get killed, but it was another story when it came to dying due to illness.

Nevertheless, Jiang Suizhou had always been broad-minded, only thinking of taking one step and looking around before taking another.

In front of him, Huo Wujiu's lips moved inaudibly, as if he wanted to say something, but swallowed it.

Jiang Suizhou did not notice his abnormality. After the quip, he continued, "However, this Prince did see Pang Shao today."

When Huo Wujiu heard these words, he raised his eyes and looked at Jiang Suizhou quietly, waiting for his next words.

He heard Jiang Suizhou say, "Today, when I came out of the palace, I happened to run into him. I spotted a eunuch next to him, so I think the Emperor doesn't want to see him just yet. He went there on his own initiative."

Huo Wujiu nodded in response: "Did you speak with him?"

Jiang Suizhou smiled and said, “Yes, I did. I feigned complete ignorance, mocked him a couple of times, and acted the part of a villain intoxicated by success.”

Huo Wujiu hmmed. He didn’t say anything, but when he raised his eyes to Jiang Suizhou, the corners of his lips curled up imperceptibly.

This man didn’t often smile, but every time he smiled, even the tiniest hint of it made him look radiant. He was especially dazzling.

Jiang Suizhou was rather stunned.

When he spoke again, he almost stammered.

“What’s wrong?” He asked with a trace of lump in his throat.

Huo Wujiu replied, “Nothing. I just recalled the birthday banquet at the palace that day. You performed remarkably in front of Pang Shao.”

Jiang Suizhou was rendered speechless, and actually blushed a little.

Even if Huo Wujiu didn’t say it outright, the two of them knew it by heart. As a last resort that day, he had to play a tenth of a pervert in front of Pang Shao.

However, he did not expect that Huo Wujiu would one day joke about this matter.

His blush receded, and he actually found it quite funny. He cleared his throat and gave Huo Wujiu across him a glance, a condescending posture.

“Madam Huo,” he said with an accent, “This Prince doesn’t like people who are arrogant because they’re favored.”

Huo Wujiu knew that he was joking and knew that he should have laughed along at this time.

However, when he let this man give him a look across from him, a single glance at his arrogant posture instantly drew his heart taut and rendered all

his meridians a bit numb.

His throat rolled, and he couldn’t help but chant a heart cleansing mantra deep down.

Jiang Suizhou failed to notice his strangeness. He burst out laughing, then sternly continued, “However, on the way back from the palace today, this Prince was thinking about one thing.”

Huo Wujiu suppressed his thoughts and replied, “What is it?”

Jiang Suizhou said leisurely, “The rift between Jiang Shunheng and Pang Shao is a foregone conclusion, but will they one day reconcile?”

Huo Wujiu fell silent for a moment, then answered, “It’s inevitable.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“This Prince thinks so too,” he said, “First of all, Jiang Shunheng is simple minded and has been coddled by Pang Shao and Empress Dowager Pang since childhood. He trusts them very much. Secondly, although several of the Pang Shao related incidents hoodwinked Jiang Shunheng, they did not infringe on his throne. It won’t take long for Pang Shao to please him again.”

Huo Wujiu hummed in response.

“Then what do you think?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou replied, “It takes more than one cold day for the river to freeze three feet deep. It’s impossible to accomplish something in one step. For the following days, it’s enough for us to take a breather and a chance to expand our power and suppress Pang’s party. Afterward… we need to counter every trick.”

Huo Wujiu said, “By all means, make up your mind.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded thoughtfully.

But Huo Wu Jiu, who slowly retracted his gaze, had a complicated expression.

Jiang Suizhou was right. Pang Shao would definitely regain the Hou Zhu's trust, but it would take some time. And the best way for him to gain trust…

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

It was to attack the hated Jingwang.

——

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Chapter 91

Indeed, Pang Shao had been exerting himself to the utmost these days.

All kinds of priceless treasures were sent to the palace like running water. Beauties from all over the world were also sent to the palace in a variety of ways.

Jiang Suizhou listened to the news at the Ministry of Rites. When he heard everything, the Hou Zhu relaxed his mouth a bit.

Gradually, Pang Shao wouldn’t be turned away whenever he begged for an audience. He would always see him once or twice out of five times. Then, as long as Pang Shao entered the palace, he would meet with him. Recently, he had begun to take the initiative to summon Pang Shao.

Everyone in the court said that the Chief Minister truly had His Majesty’s heart. Even after committing such a huge mistake, the Emperor couldn’t bear to really blame him.

That being said, so long as the Emperor was in power, nothing could shake the Chief Minister’s position.

Jiang Suizhou noted all of this in his mind.

He knew there would be such a day sooner or later. Jiang Shunheng was raised in the deep palace since he was a child and had always been spoiled and doted on. Although he was currently past the age, he was still just a child who only wanted to enjoy the moment.

Still, the Pang party had suffered a significant blow in the past days.

Not to mention that when Pang Shao was met with a mishap, the Hou Zhu replaced quite a number of core officials in Pang's party with nominees from poor and humble families whom Qi Min recommended. It could be said that Pang's party, who were still within the central government, also felt imperiled and dared not act flamboyantly or wantonly as before.

After all, everyone witnessed everything. Although the Chief Minister was eminent and could not be shaken by the elements, once something happened, the officials underneath him could be killed or replaced at will. Nobody could shelter them.

They sought benefits from being Pang Shao's men and also wanted to pave ways out for themselves. When accidents occurred, Pang Shao couldn't protect them, so they could only think of new ways to protect themselves.

For a time, there was like a change of blood in the entire court, showing a somewhat clear and positive trend.

Qi Min also seemed to know that all this was related to Jiang Suizhou.

The first time Jiang Suizhou attended the court session after he returned from recuperation, Qi Min found him afterward and said he wanted to invite him to his manor for a drink to express his gratitude.

Jiang Suizhou, however, knew that he couldn't go by himself.

Previously, the Hou Zhu gave Qi Min no attention. The previous incident could be considered a blessing out of a misfortune, and he was relying a bit on him now. The more this happened, the more Jiang Suizhou couldn't get too close to him. After all, once he contaminated him, the trust of the Hou Zhu in Qi Min would most probably crumble.

"This Prince doesn't know what Lord Qi wants to thank me for," Jiang Suizhou looked at Qi Min with a gentle smile. Although his tone was light, he wasn't at all polite.

Then, he raised his voice a few octaves, so that the surrounding officials could hear him loud and clear.

“Lord Qi, just do your job. Mind your own business, and don’t provoke this Prince.”

After saying that, he flicked his sleeves and left.

As expected, it did not take long for the matter to reach the Hou Zhu’s ears. He didn’t say anything, but from then on, he relied heavily on Qi Min a bit more.

In the courtroom, complaints about Jingwang’s frivolity and insolence circulated rampantly.

There were also many people who complained to Qi Min’s ears.

When Qi Min heard them, he ignored them all, except for one day when he was alone in his study, he let out a long sigh while dealing with official business.

“If Jingwang had been born a few years earlier, I believe an old fellow like me would have had the opportunity to see the walls of Ye City again in my remaining years.”

Jiang Suizhou was in the dark about what Qi Min thought in private. He didn’t pay any attention to these either, but rather waited patiently for movements in court.

It didn’t take long for Pang Shao to make a big move.

He himself subsidized a lot of gold and silver, built large-scale constructions, and was in the process of repairing one that could be completed in a year or two. The Hou Zhu had always been fond of hunting. There were many mountains outside Ye City and grasslands stretching hundreds of miles out of the city, so it was most suitable.

Since the capital was moved to Lin’an, Pang Shao spent a lot of effort and finally found a satisfactory place in Tianping Mountain. But after moving the capital, repairing the palace and raising the army cost money. There was

constant banditry in the south, so the matter of building the imperial hunting ground was delayed again and again.

However, in less than a month, Pang Shao suddenly spent money to build the imperial hunting ground and raised a lot of fowls and beasts.

Early this morning at the court, he informed the Hou Zhu of the matter.

After hearing his report, the Hou Zhu was overjoyed. He said that it was going to be summer, so he must go hunting before the days turn hot. After discussing with Pang Shao, they set the date to be in half a month's time.

Jiang Suizhou knew why Pang Shao was in such a hurry.

It was because two or three days ago, good news had reached them saying that General Lou Yue had pacified the bandits in the south, and after disposing of the remnants, he would return to the court.

If Qi Min only annoyed Pang Shao and caused him trouble, Lou Yue was the real thorn in Pang Shao's eye and flesh.

Southern Jing was short of generals, and Lou Yue was Southern Jing's number one general. He was bad tempered and always openly opposed Pang Shao, but Pang Shao wanted to reuse him, so he had been unable to do anything to him.

This man was the most difficult for him to deal with.

Therefore, Pang Shao had to coax the Hou Zhu, and had to hurry before Lou Yue returned to the court, in order to set his mind at ease and deal with Lou Yue.

Today, Jiang Suizhou returned to the manor and went to Huo Wujiu's room. He contemplated the matter, not speaking for a long time.

"What are you thinking about?" Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou sat down at the edge of his bed and said, "This Prince was thinking about who to take with him to the hunt at Tianping Mountain."

As he said that, he analyzed by himself, “When the ruler goes on a hunting trip, his ministers follow and always bring their families. This Prince discussed with Gu Changyun and Xu Du. Both of them were concerned about my safety, so they agreed to let Xu Du accompany me. Although he looks weak, he’s somewhat skilled in martial arts… However, someone still needs to keep watch in the capital. Once Xu Du is gone, I’m afraid that Gu Changyun can not manage the men well.”

After speaking, he sighed.

“This Prince should have taken two more staff back long ago, so we wouldn’t be so lacking in manpower,” he muttered to himself.

He didn’t notice that Huo Wujiu’s gaze on the bed sank.

Then, Huo Wujiu’s voice rang.

“I’ll go with you,” he said.

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Chapter 92

Jiang Suizhou was stunned when he heard his words, “Pardon?”

Then Huo Wu Jiu said, “Aren’t you going to go hunting? I’ll go with you.”

As soon as he heard that, he knew that what Huo Wujiu suggested wasn’t at all feasible. Those two proposed that he bring Xu Du, just to let him protect him closely, lest Pang Shao attempt to attack him covertly during the hunt. Huo Wujiu couldn’t stand up after all. If he were to take him with him, it would be too late to protect him if accidents arose.

But strangely enough, he opened his mouth, but could not say no.

For a spell, he even felt touched.

It was as if this person had been with him for a long time. Even if he wasn’t capable of anything, Jiang Suizhou had an inexplicable sense of security as long as Huo Wujiu was around.

Jiang Suizhou remained silent for a moment before suppressing these irrational thoughts.

He opened his mouth and said, “But it’s inconvenient for you to move about. Lin’an is hundreds of miles away from Tianping Mountain, so it’s strenuous…”

Huo Wujiu, however, countered, “No worries.”

When Jiang Suizhou looked at him, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and said calmly, “You want to bring your family. I also count, right?”

Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth.

He wanted to refute.

But the words he just said were contrary to the implicit expectation in his heart. At this moment, as soon as Huo Wujiu interrupted, he could no longer retort.

A few moments later, he dragged out, “Then you must pay attention to safety on the road.”

——

After that day, Jiang Suizhou got busy.

As summer gradually ushered in, the daily garments of the Hou Zhu had to be changed. It was the duty of the Imperial Household Department to tailor clothes, and then the old clothes in spring and winter should be properly registered and stored away by the Ministry of Rites.

The Ministry of Rites had been busy these days, and this task fell on Jiang Suizhou’s head.

Jiang Suizhou knew that the matter of the Emperor’s court robe could not be slighted. Once it flowed out of his hand, it would be a capital crime. Because of Pang Shao, he was very careful and did everything himself. He didn’t dare to give Pang Shao the opportunity to tamper.

On this ground, he did not visit Huo Wujiu for several days in a row.

When he didn’t visit, Wei Kai took the chance to stay there for a longer time, reporting to Huo Wujiu the news from the capital of Northern Liang.

On this day, he learned from the room that Huo Wujiu was going to go hunting with Jiang Suizhou.

Wei Kai was overjoyed and said, “It turned out that it’s because of this that you said you’re in no hurry to leave! We don’t have to hide from the capital guards when we follow them out of the palace. Their honor guards will absolutely be useless. Once we’re out of the city, it’s best to find a chance to escape!”

But Huo Wujiu said indifferently, “We’re not escaping. You should prepare. Disguise as a page and push my wheelchair.”

Wei Kai was stupefied: “General?”

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes at him, and heard him ask,, “What are you planning to do if we don’t escape?”

Huo Wujiu said indifferently, “Aren’t we going to hunt? Go hunting, of course.”

Wei Kai exclaimed, “General, don’t jest me! You don’t intend to take the chance to flee, but you’re also going to…”

Huo Wujiu interrupted him.

“Just because, I have a speculation,” he said, “You’d better follow along yourself to be at ease. If my conjecture is correct, you will know when it happens.”

Hearing this, Wei Kai could only snap his mouth shut in embarrassment.

Then Huo Wu Jiu asked, “What is Jingwang busy with these days?”

Wei Kai answered, “He is arranging the emperor’s court robes for that dog emperor. It seems that he has been going out early and returning at dusk the past few days for these, seemingly in fear that someone would tamper with them.”

“Did someone do something?” Huo Wujiu asked.

Wei Kai replied, “There’s one. A member of the Pang family is in the Ministry of Rites. He’s not a high-ranking official, but a nephew of Pang Shao. However, Jingwang has been keeping an eye on him from the onset and hasn’t given him a chance to play tricks till now.”

Huo Wujiu put down the book in his hand and pondered for a moment.

“If he wants to make a move, it’s nothing more than to make Jingwang commit a grave offense,” he analyzed.

Wei Kai nodded repeatedly at his words, “Exactly! I heard that the dog Emperor is extravagant and would not wear his old clothes ever again after a season. As a result, after those emperor’s court robes were filed and put away, no one would make an inventory of them attentively. If one or two pieces are missing and appear in Jingwang Manor, won’t that be a reason to decapitate Jingwang?”

Wei Kai looked completely detached to the issue, and was talking with great interest, not noticing that his general was stroking his chin in deep thought.

As soon as he finished speaking, he heard the general ask.

“With your skills, would it be a challenge to obtain an emperor’s court robe?”

Wei Kai was taken aback.

“General, you want to lend them a hand and kill Jingwang?”

Huo Wujiu regarded him quietly.

Wei Kai’s back felt chilled from his gaze that he shut his mouth numbly: “This subordinate has misspoken. Please tell me what to do.”

The General retracted his gaze and spoke unhurriedly.

“Give someone a taste of his own medicine.”

——

Jiang Suizhou had always known that Pang Shao’s nephew was working under his command.

However, Pang Shao’s nephew was originally an unfavored son of his elder brother’s concubine. The Pang family was a large and prosperous family

with countless children and grandchildren, and his nephews were too many to count on two hands. Naturally, he didn’t pay much attention to this kind of nephew.

There was no way for Jiang Suizhou to know that this nephew couldn’t win Pang Shao’s heart. However, the man made no mistakes under his management. He had no right to drive him away, so he had to be careful with his every move to avoid trouble.

However, within a few days, the man actually brought trouble to himself.

Today, Jiang Suizhou had been in the Ministry of Rites to deal with follow-up matters, and it wasn’t until late at night did he return to the manor.

He was in a trance until he returned to his house. He only felt that what happened in the daytime was surreal.

When he returned to the house, he couldn’t help but go straight to Huo Wujiu.

Recently, it had become his habit to find Huo Wujiu when accidents happened.

Huo Wujiu hadn’t slept yet.

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Chapter 93

“What’s wrong?” Huo Wujiu asked when he saw Jiang Suizhou sitting down in front of him.

Jiang Suizhou raised his head, looked at him steadily for a moment, and uttered, “A man died under this Prince.”

Huo Wujiu’s eyebrows jumped: “Who is it?”

Jiang Suizhou answered, “A minor official of the Ministry of Rites, named Pang Zong. He’s… a nephew of Pang Shao.”

Huo Wujiu immediately understood what was going on.

Wei Kai had always been quick to handle affairs, so he must have gotten his hands on it today.

Huo Wujiu didn’t bat an eyelid: “Look at you, don’t tell me you’re feeling sorry for Pang Shao, are you?”

Jiang Suizhou shook his head.

“No,” he added. “This Prince just thinks it’s too bizarre, like a dream.”

After muttering that, he looked at Huo Wujiu and said, “Do you know how he died?”

Of course Huo Wujiu knew. After all, it was his idea and his order to get that man killed.

However, he acted rather enthusiastically and asked, “How did he die?”

Jiang Suizhou narrated, “Halfway to the Chief Minister’s residence, the horses pulling his carriage were spooked. He was thrown out of the carriage and fell to his death.”

Huo Wujiu commented calmly, “Oh, it turned out to be an accident.”

Jiang Suizhou carried on, “However, an emperor’s court robe he had hidden fell out of his carriage. Timely enough, many people caught sight of it. Now, the capital is abuzz, saying that Pang Shao is harboring a disloyalty and wants to take over the Jiang family name.”

Huo Wujiu chuckled.

Wei Kai’s work was really reassuring. He executed everything from start to finish without leaving a trace, all according to his directives.

“And then what happened?” he urged.

Jiang Suizhou said, “The Emperor was naturally furious, and immediately summoned Pang Shao to confront him. Although Pang Shao had an alibi, the Emperor refused to listen. In the end, Pang Shao could only shake off the responsibility and only claimed that he had no knowledge of the matter; that perhaps his unfavored nephew had his own dissent and did something secretly. In order to dispel the Emperor’s doubts, he also offered to severely punish Pang Zong’s family branch.”

Jiang Suizhou inhaled slowly.

“Today, Pang Zong’s family, including his father and brothers, have all been imprisoned. Presumably even if they are still alive, they will all be dismissed from office and banished to the frontier.”

Huo Wujiu smirked without moving a muscle, quite satisfied with the result.

He asked, “Isn’t that a good thing?”

Jiang Suizhou nodded: “It’s wonderful news, but I find it… strange as hell.” He frowned and said thoughtfully.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyebrows while maintaining his composure, surprised by his reaction.

“What’s weird about it?” he asked.

“These days, Pang Shao has had one accident after another, but you and I both know that those incidents were all man-made, and I was behind them,” he said. “But today’s incident, I didn’t do anything at all.”

Huo Wujiu remarked, “Maybe it’s a coincidence?”

Jiang Suizhou shook his head without a second thought.

“Impossible,” he said, “So I’ve been wondering… who is the person behind this that is so powerful?”

Huo Wujiu didn’t say a word and just listened to him quietly.

Then he heard Jiang Suizhou add, “This person is well-informed. His idea is ingenious, and his means are also sharp and ruthless. Now, Pang Zong is dead, and a dead man tells no tales. He only left public evidence, which naturally makes Pang Shao unable to argue against countless mouths. Having set up such a trap, while promptly drowning any arguments, this person must be a cruel character.”

Huo Wujiu paused and nodded in agreement.

But then Jiang Suizhou frowned and continued.

“What’s even stranger is that he didn’t involve this Prince at all.”

Huo Wujiu added inwardly, *That’s not nonsense.*

Jiang Suizhou said to himself, “The emperor’s court robe in his carriage was handled by him. The Ministry of Rites recorded it on the books, absolving this Prince of any blame. This person attacked Pang Shao viciously and happened to avoid me. Say… do I know this person?”

Huo Wujiu’s brow jerked.

Maybe he's more than just an acquaintance, he mentally murmured.

Outwardly, he didn't bat an eyelid and remained calm and collected.

"Maybe," he said, "Do you have any guesses?"

Jiang Suizhou mused.

"This Prince has been thinking about it all afternoon, and I can't figure it out," he said, "Nowadays, there are few people in the court who are capable of fighting against Pang Shao. General Lou is not in Lin'an, so I'm sure he can't stretch his hands this far. Qi Min has the intentions, but not someone who would kill… so narrowing it down, this Prince does not know who it is."

Jiang Suizhou stared intently at the flickering candle lights on the table. He was pondering seriously that his eyebrows were knitted tightly, making Huo Wujiu feel a bit guilty, as if he had played tricks on him.

Perhaps it was because it was rainy in the south, and it was humid all around, that was why as time passed by, someone's heart easily softened.

He mentally sighed and opened his mouth to speak.

However, Jiang Suizhou looked up at him with a smile in his eyes.

"This Prince may not guess who it is, but no matter his identity, he's rather a sharp and good person," he said. He raised his hand across the quilt and patted Huo Wujiu gently.

"Since he acted so, he should have good intentions for this Prince. Rest assured. If I ever get to know this man one day, I will definitely try my best to commision him and have him protect you."

Huo Wujiu paused and swallowed back all the words that reached his lips.

"… That sounds great." A few moments later, he said slowly.

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Chapter 94

Jiang Suizhou returned to the manor late today, but hadn’t chanced upon Pang Shao.

The servants in the Pang residence waited in fear and trepidation in the house until after the fourth night watch. When the sky slightly brightened, a servant from the gate house came to report that their master had returned from the palace.

The servants around had never waited upon Pang Shao with such gloomy countenance.

For a moment, everyone dared not step forward. They watched Pang Shao stride all the way to the main hall, close the door and go straight to meet the ministers who were waiting in the Pang Manor until dawn.

The servants outside the door heard Pang Shao lose his temper in the room.

As for the ministers in the room, no one dared to breathe heavily.

They were all aware of Pang Zong’s thoughts. It wasn’t a day or two for him to curry favor with Pang Shao. However, no one expected this man to be so bold and also so coincidentally be met with an accident on his way to the Pang Manor.

Pang Zong’s father was Pang Shao’s elder brother born from a concubine. Although his official position was not as high as Pang Shao, he was a very powerful right-hand man. Today, Pang Shao pushed his whole family out in order to get rid of suspicions on him. For Pang Shao, this wasn’t a gecko breaking its tail, but his own arm.

Pang Shao was rightfully furious.

However, he was getting older. He spent the greater part of the night in the palace and had little strength to fly into a temper. Nevertheless, he smashed a tea cup, reprimanded several people in front of him, and sat in the master's chair, gasping for breath.

"I thought he was just a sick dog who could not live for a few years, but I didn't expect such sharp teeth and claws. I've always underestimated him." Pang Shao clenched his teeth in anger.

The officer beside him immediately asked, "Chief Minister, could it be that someone did this on purpose at this time?"

Pang Shao sneered.

"Otherwise, do you think he just wanted to use the emperor's court robe to frame Jingwang and came to me to ask for credit? That his horse coincidentally got spooked, he fell to his death and coincidentally allowed the emperor's robe to fly out of his carriage?" he questioned, "If you do think so, then it is the gods in the sky who want my life."

The man promptly agreed, "What Your Excellency said is true. This matter is indeed fishy! But… How did Your Excellency know about who directed it?"

Pang Shao raised his eyes and stared at him.

"From the top to the bottom of the court, who else needs to do this, and who else has the ability to execute it?"

"Uh…"

For a moment, the crowd looked at each other.

Pang Shao scoffed.

"Just in time, His Majesty loves hunting. I'll give him a big gift in the hunting ground in a few days to make amends."

——

After Pang Zong died, even Jiang Suizhou's errands at the Ministry of Rites proceeded a lot smoother.

In a few days, he finished the task at hand.

Seeing that the summer was about to start, the day when the Emperor would leave for Tianping Mountain approached. Jiang Suizhou rested for a few days, and then began to prepare for the hunting trip.

This was indeed quite a problem for him.

He was inept at horse riding. Before transmigrating, he went to the racecourse at most and rode around the flat track in full gear. After coming here, he traveled either in a sedan chair or a carriage, and never once rode a horse.

Once they arrive at the hunting ground, it would take some effort to find ways to avoid loafing on his job.

Gu Changyun and Xu Du were also quite worried about Jiang Suizhou's decision and came to persuade him several times.

Their uneasiness was nothing more than distrust of Huo Wujiu. Huo Wujiu was disabled after all. He couldn't walk on the road. If there was any danger, he naturally couldn't be counted on.

Jiang Suizhou, on the contrary, was quite at ease.

"It's fine. I believe there won't be too much trouble at the imperial hunting ground," he pacified them, "What's more, Huo Wujiu is a prisoner of war, and this Prince 'hates' him. Naturally, I should keep an extra eye on him. In that case, I can avoid anything about going hunting in the mountains."

Hearing Jiang Suizhou's argument, the two also felt that there was some truth in it. Furthermore, they really could not persuade Jiang Suizhou, so they could only give up.

At the end of April, the Emperor's honor guards left Lin'an.

Hundreds of majestic chariots, under the escort of the palace guards, left the city mightily and headed all the way to the north.

Tianping Mountain was more than 200 miles northwest of Lin'an and within the borders of Suzhou prefecture. It was originally a beautiful landscape, famous for its precipitous peaks and steep cliffs, and covered with maple trees. It was entirely picturesque with the red maple reflected in the river in autumn.

Before the capital was moved down south, it was quite lively in the mountain, with frequent visitors, along with a Daoist temple there. However, in the second year of moving the capital, Pang Shao took a fancy to the territory and ordered people to surround it, and it later became an imperial property. Even the Daoist temple on the mountain was demolished and transformed into a palace.

This was also the first time Jiang Suizhou took a trip out of Lin'an City.

He took Huo Wujiu into the palace early in the morning and boarded the carriage of the Jingwang Manor.

The Hou Zhu has been unhappy these days. He also kept a straight face the entire morning, and it was not until he saw Huo Wujiu that he showed a rare smile and harshly ridiculed him.

The Hou Zhu's mood turned sunny for a short time. Nonetheless, he didn't forget to dispatch 20 to 30 percent more troops to surround the Jingwang Manor carriage.

Jiang Suizhou noticed this as soon as he got into the carriage.

He swept the curtain for a couple more glances and smiled at Huo Wujiu, "Look at this, such mighty weaponry is only around His Majesty."

Huo Wujiu glanced out faintly through the gap in the carriage window and uttered a meaningful laugh.

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Chapter 95

“He’s exalting me,” he said.

Somehow, Jiang Suizhou felt that his laughter was bursting with contempt, as if…

It was as if his legs were healed and he disdained these people who were guarding him.

Jiang Suizhou was shocked by his thoughts and hooked his lips. He took it that he was eager for Huo Wujiu’s recovery, so much that he looked at everything so.

When the sky in the horizon was bright, the honor guards began to move.

Although the Hou Zhu said he was going out hunting, he was actually making excuses to go sightseeing. Attendants and eunuchs surrounded the convoy. With the armored honor guards carrying flats, the convoy marched unhurriedly.

They left Lin’an and traveled all the way north along the official road. After traveling for a long time, they seemed to have not gone far.

“How long will this journey take?” Near noon, Jiang Suizhou swept the brocade curtain of the carriage to the side and asked Meng Qianshan outside.

Meng Qianshan answered, “Your Highness, according to the current distance, I think it will be nightfall before we reach Tianping Mountain. But a front guard just sent word that we either not stop for rest for the whole day or will have to spend the night midway and arrive tomorrow.”

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes to look at the sun hanging high in the sky, responded and lowered the carriage curtain.

He sighed once he retreated into the carriage.

“What a bother,” he complained.

Huo Wujiu glanced at him, “What?”

Jiang Suizhou leaned back. The Prince’s carriage was, of course, comfortable and luxurious. Even Huo Wujiu’s wheelchair was more than enough to fit inside. The seat he was sitting on was also quite spacious and comfortable, with tea and snacks on the side table.

However, his body was suffering from the rich man’s disease.

“Sitting for a long time makes my body unwell.” He moved the soft pillow behind him and sighed.

“It will take another half day,” Huo Wujiu said.

“No.” Jiang Suizhou said. “I got up early this morning, and the carriage is shaking so much, giving me a headache.”

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes to look at him.

The man in brocade and fancy robe with chiseled eyebrows was sitting askew in a soft splendor. His brow was wrinkled, resenting his aching body and headache. He truly was pampered.

For Huo Wujiu, it was normal for him to ride horseback for days on end. If the situation was severe and he couldn’t ride horseback, it was common to walk in the rain, snow and sand with injuries. How could there be a chance to resent this and that or the effort?

If it were Huo Wujiu a year ago, and someone said such a thing in front of him, he would have single-handedly cast him out of the carriage.

But at this moment, he thought to himself, *Sure enough.*

After two or three hours of journey, it was really inhumane to keep rocking like this without giving people a chance to breathe.

He raised his hand, took out two soft pillows on his side, plugged them beside Jiang Suizhou and said, “It’s still early. Take a nap for now.”

Jiang Suizhou leaned on the soft pillows. He wasn’t that sleepy, however, so he chatted with Huo Wujiu instead, “To be honest, you must be tired from sitting in a wheelchair all day.”

Huo Wujiu had no idea what could be tiring about sitting, but since Jiang Suizhou said so, Huo Wujiu went along with him and said, “I’m fine.”

Jiang Suizhou then said, “The doctor who’s been treating you these days is only capable to this extent. Don’t worry, Gu Changyun has been ceaselessly searching for doctors. Although there are no results for the time being, we can always find someone who can cure you in a year and a half.”

Huo Wujiu was a little curious.

“Why are you so sure?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou replied, “What?”

Huo Wujiu continued, “About healing me.”

He paused, then added unhurriedly, “On that day, Jiang Shunheng watched my execution with his own eyes. He didn’t let them stop until the imperial doctor and the executioner said that my legs will forever be lame.”

He paused and then said, “How can you be sure that they will be cured?”

Jiang Suizhou was momentarily choked.

It was one thing to know about it and another to hear Huo Wujiu describe it to him.

That was clearly a bloody and deeply agonizing past, but Huo Wujiu mentioned it so lightly. It was as if he was not the one who endured such

punishment that day, or the one who was sitting in a wheelchair now.

Jiang Suizhou did not speak for a while.

Just as Huo Wuju's inquiring gaze fell on him, Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes to look out the window and spoke gently.

"If this Prince says I can cure you, then I can cure you," he declared.

There was no expression on his face, but Huo Wujiu could gauge the determination in his eyes.

It was not the determination to win, but the firmness to accomplish something, even at any cost.

Huo Wujiu couldn't help but clench his hand on his knee.

Jiang Suizhou continued speaking.

"There are countless doctors in the world. Not all of them are in the Imperial Hospital, and not all treatment methods are found there. What's more, Jiang Shunheng has done all sorts of evil. Not everything will go his way," Jiang Suizhou said.

Huo Wujiu stared at him.

He wanted to tell him that in fact, he had already achieved what he had tried so hard to do long ago.

If he hadn't sacrificed himself and damaged his health to find a doctor for him, Li Changning and Wei Kai wouldn't have entered the manor so early, and his legs wouldn't have been cured in advance, without the slightest disability.

However, he couldn't speak of it for the time being.

Back then, he just thought all this was none of his business. They were not involved in any way, so there was no need to be frank.

But now, he wanted to establish a relationship with him. It was just that because of those momentary thoughts that day, he began to worry that his dishonesty would be classified as deception.

He had always been decisive in attacking and cutting someone down, but this simple thought made his lips and tongue pressed in his teeth. He wavered to and fro, unable to voice it out.

For a moment, only a faint “hmm” remained, fleeting, and drowned by the clatter of the wheels.

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Chapter 96

Jiang Suizhou chatted with Huo Wujiu and gradually fell asleep.

His seat was soft, but the carriage wall was nothing but hard. He leaned against the carriage somewhat uncomfortably as the carriage jolted.

But perhaps he was sound asleep, so little by little, this discomfort disappeared. He seemed to be leaning on a hard but tough thing, warm and smooth, holding him in place. It felt like gradually sinking into an embrace.

He slept until Meng Qianshan awakened him.

“Your Highness, Your Highness, wake up. We are here,” Meng Qianshan called in front of him.

When Jiang Suizhou opened his eyes in a daze, he discovered that the outside the carriage window was ablaze with lights. They had entered a courtyard. The servants were already waiting outside the carriage. Huo Wujiu was also sitting beside the carriage, with Wei Kai pushing him from the back.

When Li Changning decocted medicine for him that day, he said it was inconvenient for him to accompany him, but Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu needed someone to decoct medicine every day, so he asked Jiang Suizhou to bring his apprentice with them.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t want to speak out, and was afraid of making mistakes, so he simply let Wei Kai take Sun Yuan’s position and left Sun Yuan in the manor.

He felt drowsy with a hazy patch before his eyes. After a while, he gradually recovered his divine consciousness.

“I slept so soundly, I didn’t even realize that we had arrived,” he said somewhat hoarsely.

He got off the carriage with Meng Qianshan’s help and saw that they finally reached the palace park on the mountain. Although the altitude of Tianping Mountain wasn’t high, the mountain peaks stretched. This was one of them, and the former site of the Daoist temple that was demolished two years ago.

It was true that the scenery in the place was spectacular. In the evening, they could vaguely make out the verdant mountains, the dense forests at the foot of the mountain and the gurgling river. Pang Shao had put a lot of work into it. Although the palatial garden area on the mountain wasn’t that large, every corner was exquisite and unique. From a distance, it resembled the dwelling place of immortals in the mountains.

The main room in the courtyard was a five room house with two rows of wing rooms on both sides. Meng Qianshan settled the people down quickly, and invited Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu into the main room.

There were two beds in the east and west rooms, so it saved a lot of trouble.

Although Jiang Suizhou had slept throughout the journey, the carriage was bumpy, so he felt sore and fatigued. When he got into the room, Meng Qianshan served him to clean up, and then he laid down on the bed.

“This Prince feels like my body is much better.” Jiang Suizhou said.

Meng Qianshan smiled and pulled the blanket for him while asking, “What do you mean, Your Highness?”

Jiang Suizhou replied, “This morning, this Prince sat in the carriage and felt sore all over. I initially thought I couldn’t stick it through all the way, but surprisingly, I’m not as tired as I imagined until now.”

Meng Qianshan sniggered at his words.

“What’s the matter?” Jiang Suizhou was puzzled.

Then he saw Meng Qianshan shake his head repeatedly.

“Nothing, nothing,” he laughed, “This servant is happy for Your Highness.”

Jiang Suizhou looked puzzled and couldn’t help but observe him a bit more, but didn’t question him any further.

As Meng Qianshan spoke, he let down the bed curtains for Jiang Suizhou and retreated with a grin.

He was naturally happy for the Prince, but he couldn’t speak frankly as to why.

After Meng Qianshan exited Jiang Suizhou’s bedroom, he chortled.

He couldn’t possibly tell the Prince that he wasn’t fatigued by the long journey today because his body was hale and hearty, right?

He replayed what he saw during the day today once more.

He opened the curtains of the carriage today in an attempt to answer the Prince, but he found him sleeping. He was not leaning against the carriage, but Madam Huo, who was sitting in a wheelchair beside him and was letting Jiang Suizhou lean on his shoulder.

When he opened the curtain, Madam Huo was gazing down at the Prince. Meng Qianshan had never seen that look in his eyes before.

From what the Prince said just now, it must be because Madam Huo let him sleep against him the entire time.

Meng Qianshan couldn’t hold back his laughter again.

There was no question he was happy for the Prince. He was glad he wasn’t harboring wishful thoughts, and that it was a mutual affection.

——

The palatial garden on the mountain wasn’t extensive, and there were few rooms in the wing rooms on both sides. Due to the large number of servants

they brought, they had to live in a crowd. Even Meng Qianshan had to live in the same room with others.

The next day, they might have to follow the Emperor into the mountain. There were a bunch of things to do, so Meng Qianshan sent others to watch the night outside Jiang Suizhou's room, while he returned to his room to rest first.

He lived in a quieter room, with only two beds. When he entered the room, the other bed was already occupied.

Seeing him enter, the man stood up routinely and bowed: "Meng-gonggong."

The man was precisely Dr. Li Changning's apprentice, who tagged along with them pretending to be a servant.

Meng Qianshan waved his hands repeatedly and said, "Don't be so polite. You can just rest."

He specifically arranged the kid in the room. He attended to Madam Huo and decocted medicine for the two masters. The room next to them was crowded with people with varying intentions. It was not as clean as Meng Qianshan's.

Meng Qianshan noticed that the kid was dull but well-behaved. He obeyed him and sat back on the bed. Meng Qianshan sat on his bed while taking off his boots and chatting with him.

"Your master has also been serving at the Prince's side for a while now. Have Madam Huo's legs improved?"

When Wei Kai, who was sitting next to him and pretending to be dumb, heard his question, his nerves immediately tensed.

Here we go, he muttered deep inside.

He weighed his words carefully and said, "Meng-gonggong, we can only alleviate Madam's pain to a degree for now. This way, Madam doesn't have

to suffer painfully during rainy days. However, my master also said that the meridians on Madam's legs have been completely damaged, I'm afraid… we can only treat him to this extent."

Hearing these words, Meng Qianshan could not help but sigh.

"It's also good to reduce his pain to some extent," he remarked.

Wei Kai surveyed his expression and agreed repeatedly.

Seeing the kid's honesty, Meng Qianshan couldn't resist giving him a couple of instructions, "You and your master just serve him well. As long as Madam Huo's legs recover for one or two points, the two of you won't be without the glory and wealth in the latter half of your lives. "

The moment Wei Kai heard his instruction, he pretended to be dumbfounded, but his expression also bore a tinge of truth.

Don't tell me he discovered my identity? Otherwise, how could he say such a thing?

He watched Meng Qianshan put his boots on the ground. He then raised his eyes, glanced at him, and chuckled, "Madam Huo is quite important."

Wei Kai paused and hesitantly asked, "What… for?"

Meng Qianshan laughed a couple more times at his question.

What a truly naive boy. One was the Prince and the other was his wife. Why else would the Prince spoil his wife?

He laughed some more and glanced away.

"You don't understand," he said slowly, "After a few years, you will naturally know."

———

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Chapter 97

In the early morning of the next day, someone came to pass an edict that Jiang Suizhou should make preparations. He would go into the mountain with the Emperor to hunt.

Jiang Suizhou had a long day of travel yesterday and did not want to move at this time. He initially intended to send Meng Qianshan back and have him report that he was weary and sick, but the eunuch who delivered the decree insisted on waiting there, saying that the Emperor had decreed that Jingwang must go today.

Of course, Jiang Suizhou knew that the Hou Zhu didn't mean well.

He had no other choice but to turn over and sit up from the bed, asking Meng Qianshan to help him change into his riding outfit.

But at that instant, Huo Wujiu entered with his wheelchair.

"What's the matter?" Jiang Suizhou promptly raised his head and asked.

Huo Wujiu glanced outside.

Although all the servants in the courtyard were from Jiang Suizhou's manor, all the guards around were from the palace. They guarded every exit in the yard.

"Before you leave, start a conflict with me," Huo Wujiu instructed, "Make a lot of noise, just say you are ill at ease with me and lock me in the main room."

After a pause, he continued, "Only Wei Kai alone in the room will be fine."

Jiang Suizhou froze in his tracks: “Why is that?”

Huo Wujiu opened his mouth to explain, but when he raised his eyes, he discovered someone outside the window who seemed to be trying to look in from afar. He lowered his head and said succinctly, “It’s for self-defense.”

Jiang Suizhou found it reasonable after consideration. He would take his people away, leaving Huo Wujiu here alone. If the Emperor were to send someone over, what would he do?

Jiang Suizhou nodded quickly and imperceptibly, signaling that he understood.

Hence, the eunuch sent by the Emperor waited for half an hour, and saw His Highness Jingwang looking vexed and walking out of the room in a riding suit. The servants around him also looked as if they had received reprimand and came out of the room with their heads bowed.

Seeing this, the eunuch immediately approached.

He heard Jingwang coldly instructing his servants to lock the door.

“Give the key to this Prince. If this Prince doesn’t come back, even if he dies inside, no one is allowed to open the door,” he stood at the door and ordered coldly from a commanding height.

“Oh no, Your Highness, you…” The eunuch quickly stepped forward and spoke.

“What?” Jiang Suizhou turned his head sideways and said grimply, “Do you also want to manage this Prince’s household affairs?”

The eunuch hesitated for a moment, but he was quite quick-witted. He slipped along the gap in the door and found the ice-cold Huo Wujiu, sitting inside with a cold face, with only a wheelchair pusher behind him.

The eunuch uttered an ow.

“Your Highness, the accompanying ministers all have their families with them today!” He added, “Why do you bother to lock the Madam in the room…”

“He can’t even ride a horse, so is he going to lose under this Prince?” he countered.

“Err…”

The eunuch was about to speak again when he saw Meng Qianshan bitterly step forward and pulled him aside.

“Gonggong, you should stop persuading him!” Meng Qianshan said, “Don’t mind the one in there!”

Speaking of which, he lowered his voice and said mysteriously, “The one inside is a captive, and it’s not like you don’t know… The Prince locked him up, not only because he doesn’t want to bring him along, but also to prevent him from going out. He locked him up for fear that he might escape.”

The eunuch responded with understanding and thanked Meng Qianshan.

Jiang Suizhou told Meng Qianshan earlier that the eunuch would definitely tell the Emperor everything he heard. Therefore, after finishing what he should say, he folded his hands and stood away. He made sure that the heavy locks locked the room tightly, and even the windows were closed one by one.

Only then did Jingwang lead the people and leave the court with great fanfare.

The courtyard gradually quieted down.

“General?” Once Wei Kai heard no movement outside, he quickly moved forward. He was also shocked by today’s sudden scene, and was unable to regain his senses for a while.

Just then, the General in the wheelchair stood up and neatly loosened his belt.

“Let’s exchange clothes,” he ordered Wei Kai.

Wei Kai was stunned, but he did not dare to disobey the General’s order and moved to take off his robe.

“Listen carefully to my next words,” Huo Wujiu said.

Wei Kai hurriedly answered.

“What happened this morning was deliberate on my part,” he said. “I’m going out for a while. You just sit in the wheelchair and wait for my return. Just remember not to make any noise. The doors and windows are locked, so no one will come in.”

“Got it,” Wei Kai said. “But General, what are you going to do?”

Huo Wujiu had already taken off his outer robe, draped the short top Wei Kai had placed on the table over his body, and put it on with alacrity.

He tied his long hair at the back of his head and looked at Wei Kai.

“That day, didn’t I tell you I want to take someone with me?” he asked.

Wei Kai nodded in response.

He watched Huo Wujiu tie his hair, and when he finished, he raised his hand and patted Wei Kai on the shoulder.

“That person is Jingwang,” he said. “It’s unsafe in the wilderness, so I’ll go and protect him.”

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Chapter 98

As Jiang Suizhou expected, when he rode his horse to the bottom of the hill, what he had just done in the courtyard already reached everyone’s ears.

When he arrived, the Hou Zhu said with an odd smile, “Fifth Brother, it can be said that you’re our trusted aid. It is so gratifying to know that you worry about our worries and consider our thoughts!”

Everyone around followed suit and laughed with him.

He was in a jolly mood today, and Jiang Suizhou heard more or less about it.

After all, Pang Shao knew how to play his cards best. He not only made his new lover serve on the Hou Zhu’s side, but also tried every means to find him a precious horse. The hounds the eunuchs were controlling on the side were also tall and mighty. There were countless rare and exotic animals in the hunting ground, each of which were very much to the Hou Zhu’s liking.

The Hou Zhu lazily waved the whip in his hand and urged his horse to walk in front of Jiang Suizhou.

“Shall we, Fifth Brother?” he asked with a smile.

“This younger brother is in poor health, and arrived late. Please punish me,” Jiang Suizhou bowed his head and said.

The Hou Zhu burst into laughter and scrutinized him from top to bottom.

Jiang Suizhou wore a black riding suit today. He looked neat and tidy, but it was difficult to hide his pale complexion.

“Not a problem,” the Hou Zhu replied lightly, and then urged his horse to gallop forward.

The crowd then followed him to the hunting grounds.

A large area of hills, rivers and thickets surrounded the foot of the mountain, and it was impossible to estimate the edge at a glance.

The regions south of the Great River were different from the north, and it was rare to see extensive flat grasslands. But since they had to hunt on horsebacks, the thickets made it a bit inconvenient. At the foot of the mountain, Pang Shao deliberately ordered people to clear all the trees in a flat space and replace them with a meadow.

When everyone arrived, many guards on horseback were already scattered around the pasture. They were driving the animals enclosed in the mountains out of the woods and onto the meadow for the Hou Zhu to hunt.

The Hou Zhu’s eyes lit up.

“Since everybody’s here, all of you can help yourselves. I have a huge reward for those who win first prize today!”

After he said this, the Hou Zhu drew his bow and arrow on his back, whipped his horse, and charged toward a goat in front of him.

Although the people behind the Hou Zhu heard him say ‘help yourself’, they all knew that His Majesty’s riding and shooting skills were quite average. If they really were to obey His Majesty ‘help yourself’ decree, it would be equivalent to slapping His Majesty on the face and ruining his good mood.

For a time, the crowd dispersed, but most of them followed far behind the Hou Zhu.

Jiang Suizhou wasn’t interested in joining the fun, so he rode his horse and cantered along. Fortunately, the weather was overcast, and the sun wasn’t

too bright. Jiang Suizhou felt like going out for a walk. It was quite comfortable.

He watched from afar as the Hou Zhu hunted.

He was indeed terrible at archery. The goat was driven out of the mountain and was already a bit exhausted, yet there was a group of guards chasing after it to block its escape. Even so, the Hou Zhu let several arrows lose, but only one hit the goat's buttocks. It felt so pained that it rampaged forward.

However, no matter what kind of archery skill the Hou Zhu possessed, people still praised him.

Therefore, the Hou Zhu was rather confident. He released arrows one after the other, but even if he hit the target, he failed to hit any vital points.

The goat had received four or five arrows from the Hou Zhu before it finally collapsed to the ground with a wail. It was surrounded by the guards, who pounced on it.

"Your Majesty's archery skill is superb. You have hunted a big beast so quickly!" An official behind him shouted in praise.

The Hou Zhu was tired and sweaty, clasping his bow with one hand and panting. When he looked back, he saw the ministers scattered on the hunting ground, all with empty hands. The one or two that had hit a prey only caught rabbits and pheasants.

The Hou Zhu displayed satisfaction and ordered people to carry the goat down. Tonight, it would be cooked into dishes and distributed to everyone.

In an instant, gratitude rained down in succession from the ministers.

The Hou Zhu looked around and asked, "Hmm? Why is my Fifth Brother missing?"

Seeing that the Hou Zhu was looking for Jingwang, all the people followed suit and searched around. A few moments later, Jiang Suizhou rode his horse and trotted up to his side.

“Imperial Brother, you were galloping too fast. I couldn’t keep up for a long time,” Jiang Suizhou explained with a smile.

The Hou Zhu glanced at his unhealthy complexion and curled his lips happily.

“Fifth Brother, don’t just watch, either,” he said, “No matter what, you also have to hunt something today.”

Jiang Suizhou clasped his fist atop his horse and said, “Understood.”

The Hou Zhu turned around, looked at Pang Shao, and then said to Jiang Suizhou, “Follow me, and hunt with me today.”

Jiang Suizhou felt annoyed at heart, but did not dare to show it on the surface. Instead, he answered, “Got it.”

He thought to himself, in any case, when the Hou Zhu spotted a prey, he couldn’t care about anything. Anyway, I’m not in good health and can’t perform martial arts. It’ll be understandable if I can’t keep pace with them by then.

But at that moment, a cry rang out in the distance.

The crowd followed the sound and saw a tall beautiful stag driven out of the forest.

Unlike the goat just now, the stag was powerfully built, tall and running speedily. Although several imperial bodyguards drove it away on horseback, it showed no signs of fatigue. Even when someone stopped it, it would bow its head and attack with its horns.

“Your Majesty!” a minister exclaimed from the side

The Hou Zhu’s eyes were fixed on the deer. He raised his whip and said, “Let’s go and hunt it down!”

After announcing this, he charged toward the stag.

Jiang Suizhou sighed in resignation and raised his whip to follow.

Then he watched as the Hou Zhu once again started aiming arrows at the stag, all of which missed the target in succession. Gradually, the Hou Zhu became a little anxious and grabbed an arrow from behind him.

Finally, an arrow hit the stag’s hind leg.

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Chapter 99

The stag let out a plaintive whine and launched into a frenzy. It dismounted the nearest imperial bodyguard off his horse and charged straight into the forest in the distance.

Everyone around was thrown into a panic and hurried to give chase. However, it was the His Majesty's prey. Without His Majesty's order, none of them dared to hunt it.

The Hou Zhu looked around, turned his horse's head and headed towards Jiang Suizhou.

"Fifth Brother, quickly give chase and help me get that stag back!" the Hou Zhu ordered loudly Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

You want me to go after it?

However, before he could refuse, the Hou Zhu had already rushed to his side. He tugged the reins to hide, but the Hou Zhu raised his whip and fiercely brought it down on his horse.

The horse neighed and rushed toward the direction of the stag.

Jiang Suizhou was caught off guard and hastily tugged the reins to stop his horse. But at this point, the sound of a slash echoed in the air behind him. It was swift, and then he heard his horse neighing again.

This time, the horse has gone mad and galloped forward like the wind.

Jiang Suizhou pupils instantly shrank.

That's undoubtedly a concealed weapon!

But he couldn’t care less. He desperately attempted to stabilize his body on the horse, to prevent being thrown off the horse’s back. He saw the dense jungle in front of him, and further ahead, the mountains hidden in the forest.

He had to find a way to make his horse stop!

However, there was no question that a concealed weapon hit the horse. It was already driven mad and was bent on charging ahead. An imperial bodyguard nearby wanted to stop it, but he heard the Hou Zhu’s command behind him.

“Get out of the way!” The Hou Zhu roared, “Jingwang is in a hurry to go chase the prey for me. Why are you blocking the way?!”

Jiang Suizhou’s heart chilled.

In the midst of the violent bumps and gusts of wind, he vaguely recalled the look on the Hou Zhu’s face just now.

Malicious intent was painted his face, and he frequently exchanged glances with Pang Shao. It turned out that among so many great gifts that Pang Shao prepared for the Hou Zhu, he was the finale.

——

The stag rushed into the forest and ran out of sight in the blink of an eye.

Immediately after, Jiang Suizhou’s horse also rushed into the forest.

The luxuriant branches and leaves in the forest finally slowed the horse’s speed, so that Jiang Suizhou could vaguely observe the circumstances around.

Still, the horse was galloping, and was even faintly stumbling. Jiang Suizhou wasted no time to try to pull the reins, even if he could not drag it, but also to control the direction.

Unfortunately, Jiang Suizhou had poor horsemanship and a frail physique. At this time, he had exhausted all his strength. Not only could he not

control the horse, he gradually lost control of the reins and was about to fall off the horse’s back.

He clenched his teeth, his lips turning white.

He knew that the horse was fairly tall, so at such a speed, falling down meant either death or disability. The forest was scattered with branches and tree forks, and it was even more dangerous than falling on flat ground.

He forced himself to calm down as much as possible to think of countermeasures for his present dilemma.

The horse bolted at full speed that in the blink of an eye, it had disappeared into the boundless forest. He knew that the terrain of Tianping Mountain was steep, and there were not only continuous mountains, but also a multitude of canyons and abysses ahead. If the horse kept speeding up like this, he would die even if he didn’t fall off his horse.

It was now plain how much Pang Shao hated him after these past few days.

Just then, Jiang Suizhou saw a rotting tree lying in the forest not far from the left front. The tree was tall, supported by trees on either side, and was lying horizontally in mid air.

Here!

Jiang Suizhou clenched his jaw, pulled on the reins with his last bit of strength and steered the horse under him in that direction.

With a resounding bang, the horse hit the huge tree trunk.

The horse whined and fell to the ground. With its sudden slowdown, Jiang Suizhou was shot out and fell to the ground with it.

The horse tumbled to the ground, and so did Jiang Suizhou. He felt like his whole body was shattered apart. But amidst the pain of such a fall, an incisive stabbing pain struck his ankle.

That was when he finally landed on the ground. His foot braced his fall and was probably sprained.

Jiang Suizhou sucked the pain in and gasped deeply.

Fortunately. He thought. *I escaped death and came to a stop.*

However, before he could breathe a sigh of relief, he discovered a few black shadows above the dense canopy around him with his perspective of lying on the ground.

Somebody's here!

Immediately after, a familiar whistle in the air greeted him.

A sharp arrow was reflected in his pupils, and the tip of it was flying towards him.

So it was the mantis stalking the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind it.

Jiang Suizhou was beyond exhausted, not to mention that the arrow was flying swiftly toward him in just the blink of an eye.

He realized he could not avoid it.

He faced the arrow and closed his eyes tightly.

But simultaneously, a gust of wind blew.

In front of him, a crisp 'crack' echoed. Something actually stopped the arrow.

Jiang Suizhou opened his eyes incredulously.

However, before he could register what was going on in front of him, someone grabbed his arm. A herculean surge of force lifted him off the ground.

He followed the inertia and crashed straight into the arms of a tall, upright man.

The next moment, his waist felt tight, being locked tightly by the man.

In a wink, the man unsheathed the sword on his side. A glint of silver flashed in front of Jiang Suizhou’s eyes, and he witnessed the man carrying him in one hand and wielding a sword with the other flawlessly. With more than a dozen crisp sharp clangs, chopped arrow debris rustled around him.

Jiang Suizhou froze and raised his head in a daze; a side face with sharp edges and corners like a sword blade caught his eyes.

Beneath his long eyelashes were a pair of dark eyes as sharp as an eagle.

… Huo Wujiu?

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Chapter 100

Jiang Suizhou froze in place, and for a while, he thought that he was hallucinating.

But the next moment, he was dragged back into reality.

He heard the whistling of the wind, accompanied by the rustling sound of tree branches and leaves, and then a few dark shadows surrounded them in an instant.

Before Jiang Suizhou could react, he felt the man tighten his hold around his waist and protect him in front.

“Be careful,” he heard the man beside him say in a concise whisper.

The bunch of shadows closed in and impermeable rushed forward like wolves hunting in the dead of the night.

With two against many, and surrounded by a group, it was no doubt a dead end.

However, the long sword that served as an ornament in his place, morphed into a sharp weapon in Huo Wujiu’s hand that sealed throats with blood. The sword displayed not the tiniest bit of fancy stance, but the several assassins trapping them simply couldn’t get close. With only a dozen rounds, the black-clad assassins who attacked fell down one after the other.

After chaotic rustles of branches and leaves, calm was restored to the surroundings.

It was just that seven or eight corpses were left beneath Huo Wujiu’s feet, and blood stained the brown soil with dark shade.

He looked up and saw Huo Wujiu holding his sword in one hand while checking on the motionless corpses on the ground.

The blade of the sword on his hand was still dripping with blood.

“… Huo Wujiu?” Jiang Suizhou called blankly.

Was he crazy or was he hallucinating? Why would Huo Wujiu appear at this time, and still stand in front of him, with his legs working as if he had not been injured at all?

Before Huo Wujiu could respond to him, an indistinct whizz broke the silence in the air.

A silver glittering concealed weapon broke through the condensed dark branches and headed straight at Jiang Suizhou’s face.

Huo Wujiu immediately carried him and dashed sideways. The silver concealed weapon whipped past his cheek and cut off a strand of his hair.

At the same time, a person leapt straight down from the canopy. In no time, he was already in front of him with a short dagger aimed straight at Huo Wujiu’s throat.

He was the leader of this bunch of assassins. He used concealed weapons to attract Huo Wujiu’s attention and then attacked while he was distracted.

Because Huo Wujiu dodged just now, he was now facing the blade. Although Huo Wujiu couldn’t deflect it, he didn’t panic at all. He wielded the sword in his hand steadily, and in the next second, the man’s warm blood splashed on half of his body.

Nonetheless, the dagger also landed straight into his shoulder socket.

Jiang Suizhou was too close to him. In a tick, he did not even see how the two moved. In just a few short rounds, he heard an inaudible muffled grunt.

It came from the chest that was pressed against his back shoulder.

His pupils shrank, and he glanced back at Huo Wujiu.

But Huo Wujiu's eyes wandered around for some time. Afterward, he slowly let go, and the sword in his hand clattered on the ground.

"Are you injured?" Jiang Suizhou heard Huo Wujiu ask him in a deep voice.

He himself, rather blandly, raised his hand and drew out the dagger in his shoulder.

His blood spurted and mixed with the assassins' blood.

For some reason, a burst of heat flooded Jiang Suizhou's eyes.

"… You're hurt," he stammered.

——

The Hou Zhu watched as the mad horse carried Jiang Suizhou into the forest. The forest ahead of the hunting ground was originally part of Tianping Mountain. The terrain inside was complex, with dense branches and bottomless depths.

The bodyguards and ministers around were all greatly frightened, but the Hou Zhu sat on the horse with his head held high, quite like a victorious general.

"No one is allowed to go in." He stared at the forest that swallowed people like a beast, and added, "I want to see whether this Fifth Brother of mine has the ability to hunt back that stag for me."

Who in the court did not know that His Highness Jingwang had not practiced martial arts for a day since he was born because of his frailness?

Of course, he was incapable of hunting a stag; he was only capable of breaking his neck in the depths of the jungle.

But no one dared to speak, because this was the family business of His Majesty.

If His Majesty wanted him to hunt stags, he had to go hunting; if His Majesty wanted him to die, then he also must die.

The expressions on all their faces were masked, while Hou Zhu raised his head and stared deep into the distance behind the forest.

It was a sublime mountain range covered by impermeable trees.

His eyes shone smilingly.

It was no secret that he wanted to kill Jiang Suizhou long ago. But at the same time, the ancestral rites and laws reigned supreme, so he couldn’t easily kill Jiang Suizhou.

But this time, his uncle agreed with him.

His uncle promised that this time, no one had to do anything. Jingwang would never come back alive.

The Hou Zhu stared far back at the mountain range, and after a moment, with a flip of his whip, he led his horse around and trotted toward the few prey scattered in the pasture in front of him as if nothing had happened.

“Why are you looking dazed?” he asked.

Only then did the crowd regain their senses. Each acted as if nothing had happened, and continued to follow the Hou Zhu to round up the hunt.

——

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Chapter 101

Jiang Suizhou was sitting alone on a tree trunk that was stretched across the ground.

Huo Wujiu moved to and fro several times and dealt with the corpses on the ground neatly. The terrain in the mountain was treacherous, and there was a canyon nearby. Huo Wujiu's movements were quite fast. In short order, everything in front of Jiang Suizhou was clean as a pin.

A few moments later, footsteps sounded in the air. Jiang Suizhou looked up and saw Huo Wujiu landing in front of him.

He did not hide his legs at all. He sat down in front of Jiang Suizhou, and ripped off the hem of his robe.

Jiang Suizhou only stared at his shoulder.

After a moment of silence, Huo Wujiu chuckled deeply.

"Ask whatever you want to ask." he prodded, "What can you know from staring at me?"

However, he heard Jiang Suizhou take a breath and say in a somewhat wavering voice, "I'll bandage it for you, all right?"

Huo Wujiu handed the torn cloth on Jiang Suizhou's lap, and while neatly unfastening his robe, he replied, "No, you don't know how."

As he spoke, he had already ripped open half of his lapel, revealing part of his muscular shoulders. It was just that when he exposed this piece of skin, several old wounds, all of which were pale scars, came to light. The deepest

one ran across his clavicle. Amidst its hideousness, the smooth and rugged collarbone actually made it appear rather charming.

And in his shoulder socket was the new wound that was still bleeding.

The dagger didn't pierce too deep, but it also tore his flesh, making it look quite appalling. Huo Wujiu put the cloth over the wound with one hand, bit down on one end, wrapped it a few times, and then roughly bandaged his wound.

Another moment of silence later, he bit the cloth. His eyes fell on his own shoulder, and he addressed Jiang Suizhou, "Aren't you going to ask when my legs healed?"

Only Huo Wujiu himself knew that he was hiding a trace of apprehension under his lowered eyelashes.

He jumped out of the back window of Jiang Suizhou's room, bypassed the surrounding guards, and then entered the mountain. When he went up the mountain the day before yesterday, he memorized the right direction and headed straight to the hunting ground.

Sure enough, Pang Shao made a move against Jiang Suizhou on the hunting grounds.

The Hou Zhu drew the whip that fell on Jiang Suizhou's horse, but Huo Wujiu knew all too well that what drove the horse crazy was the concealed weapon that struck it.

Once he fell off the horse under any circumstances, his life absolutely would be in danger. Huo Wujiu didn't care to find out who released the concealed weapon. He dove into the forest to chase after the horse. However, just when he caught up, he saw Jiang Suizhou fall into an ambush that was set up early on.

As expected, the mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind. One hoop after the other, Pang Shao made arrangements long ago with no intention of leaving Jiang Suizhou half a chance of survival.

Huo Wujiu could no longer care about anything else, and had no choice but to show himself immediately.

He knew that this was the only way he could save Jiang Suizhou. On the flip side, he also knew that in this manner, his legs would be exposed.

But he didn't regret it either.

He lowered his gaze, as if seriously dressing his wound, but the force under his hands couldn't help exert more strength. He even squeezed the wound till it bled.

Just then, Jiang Suizhou interrupted him.

"There's no need to ask," he said, "Li Changning lied to me before, didn't he?

Huo Wujiu ceased moving.

"Mm.," he responded.

"So that means he's your man," Jiang Suizhou said. "The apprentice following him resembled a man in the military camp at first sight. He didn't look right when he saw you. However, I was ill at that time and had little energy. Li Changning claimed he was a farmer, and I believed it.

Jiang Suizhou's voice was nothing but calm.

However, Huo Wujiu felt as if a fine silk thread was strangling his heart, tightening by the minute.

His hand that was tying the knot to the wound stopped in place and he didn't move much.

Sure enough, he said to himself, *He has always been smart. So long as he sees something, no further explanation is needed.*

Huo Wujiu, however, tasted some bitterness in his mouth.

Akin to a prisoner awaiting his sentence, he had been hanging all day long and the dust finally settled today but he was not happy at all.

“Yes,” he confirmed, “So…”

Therefore, I’m not a frank and honest partner. You can be disappointed with me, but I will still do what I promised before.

He choked in his throat, quite unable to speak.

Just then, Jiang Suizhou interrupted him.

“So you can’t bandage your wound like this,” he leaned down and said to Huo Wujiu, “Although I don’t know anything, I still know that you can’t bandage it tightly. Even if there’s no wound medicine here, shouldn’t you clean the wound first? I vaguely hear the sound of water. Is there a stream nearby?”

Huo Wujiu hesitated: “There’s one half a mile to the west.”

“Come on, let’s go to the stream first,” Jiang Suizhou said as he stood up.

He had been sitting for a long time, and Huo Wujiu carried him earlier, so he had forgotten that he had sprained his foot. As soon as he got up, he took a painful breath and nearly plunged to the ground.

Huo Wujiu raised his hand and caught him.

“What happened to your foot?” Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou was propped up on Huo Wujiu’s arm. His arm muscle was firm, and it felt as hard as a stone to the touch. With his support, everything was seemingly steady with a sense of security.

“When I fell off the horse, I twisted it a little,” he explained.

Huo Wujiu stood still. A moment later, he sighed helplessly and clenched his teeth.

“How can you forget even this?”

Jiang Suizhou was a little embarrassed.

In fact, what happened to Huo Wujiu when he was injured was shocking. Jiang Suizhou was too focused on checking on him and forgot about his sprain.

Huo Wujiu looked down, saw his expression and immediately understood what he was thinking.

There really was nothing he could do about the man in front of him.

He kept silent for a couple of seconds and whispered again.

“As I said earlier, Li Changning lied to you,” he said. “He follows my orders, so it’s I…”

Just then, Jiang Suizhou interrupted him.

“So, it’s a good thing, ah!” Jiang Suizhou exclaimed. “I’ve always had a headache with your legs, but I didn’t expect to have your people come to you and cure you.”

Huo Wujiu once again froze and looked down at Jiang Suizhou.

He found Jiang Suizhou also looking up at him. The sparkling joy in those eyes didn’t seem fake at all.

“So, why don’t we hurry up and go to the stream?” He urged, “If you don’t clean your wound any time soon, your legs might be fine, but your arm will be crippled.”

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Chapter 102

Although the gurgling sound of water was faintly audible from their location, there was still some distance from the stream.

Jiang Suizhou wanted Huo Wujiu to help him to the water’s edge, but Huo Wujiu bent down and pinched his ankle.

Jiang Suizhou gasped in pain, and reflexively ducked back.

Huo Wujiu straightened up and said, “You’ve sprained yourself and can’t walk at this time.”

“But…”

Before Jiang Suizhou could speak, his body lightened, and his feet were already in the air.

Huo Wujiu carried him up in a horizontal embrace.

“Hey!” Jiang Suizhou was startled and subconsciously struggled. However, Huo Wujiu held him steadily, and lifted a leg, setting out toward the water’s edge.

“Stop wriggling about,” Huo Wujiu commanded.

Jiang Suizhou felt his neck burning.

What is this, Huo Wujiu! Although he really couldn’t walk, this action was pretty ambiguous. There was something indescribably strange between them.

This strange feeling made Jiang Suizhou’s heart go pitter-patter.

“Quickly put me down first!” Jiang Suizhou cried anxiously.

Huo Wujiu glanced down at him in some confusion.

Then he noticed that under his black hair, his white and transparent ears were dusted a shade of blush.

Huo Wujiu realized in hindsight that this way of carrying him seemed to be inappropriate.

He did not think much about it just now, and only considered it more convenient. However, now that this man just let him carry him in his embrace, he looked quite well-behaved. It also seemed like he was entirely dependent on him.

Huo Wujiu actually felt reluctant to put him down again.

He maintained his composure, and only moved his eyes, averting his gaze from his ear.

“We’ll be there soon.” He looked calm, and his voice sounded indifferent, as if he hadn’t noticed any abnormality or felt the tension of the man in his arms. “Don’t struggle again, lest you fall.”

His appearance seemed to trick Jiang Suizhou. He replied with a stiff ‘Oh’ and no longer struggled to get down.

It was just that his head lowered deeper, as if to bury himself.

He didn’t realize that Huo Wujiu, who was carrying him, was not as calm as he imagined.

The pair of arms embracing him tightened two points nervously.

——

Jiang Suizhou was absent, but the Hou Zhu had quite a harvest on this day.

They rode to the hunting ground early in the morning, and by the time the sun descended, the Hou Zhu had hunted several large and small prey.

There were also a lot of military generals on the field. When it came to hunting, it was child's play for them to capture some beasts. But everyone knew that His Majesty was fond of hunting. His hunting skills were awful, and he dared not chase and kill wolves and tigers.

His Majesty loved his image, so at this turn, they naturally couldn't steal the limelight from him.

Thus, when the time came to count, only the Hou Zhu hunted the most. Afterward, the Hou Zhu pretended to train several military officials on the field, saying that their martial arts were lacking, and they needed more diligent training.

The crowd naturally responded with a resounding yes. It was plain to see that His Majesty looked like he was admonishing them, but from the look on his face, he was smug.

As expected, after His Majesty finished lecturing them, he waved his hand and asked the imperial guards to take away the animals he had hunted throughout the day and serve them up in dishes in the imperial kitchen. Tonight, the officials would enjoy a big banquet.

There was no mention of Jingwang, who had entered the forest and hadn't come back yet.

Everyone was beaming and knelt down in succession to thank him.

But at this juncture, clattering horses' hooves resounded from a distance.

The crowd raised their heads and spotted a tall dark horse carrying an adult man galloping straight toward them.

The man advanced closer until the crowd recognized his face.

He had a square wide dark face, a pair of copper bell-like eyes, tall and stocky. He was wearing official robes, reminding everyone of a ghost from

hell. He was horribly ugly.

It was Ji Hongcheng.

The Hou Zhu frowned. The look of joy on his face gave him a feeling that nothing good had happened.

Ji Hongcheng traversed directly toward him, dismounted from his horse, knelt down in front of him, and laughed aloud, “Your Majesty!”

“What’s the matter?” The Hou Zhu couldn’t care less about what good things had happened to him.

Ji Hongcheng replied, “This subject has just hunted a tiger and would like to present it to Your Majesty!”

The Hou Zhu felt a lump in his throat. The instant the ministers heard his declaration, they exchanged glances for a moment, and the joy on their faces froze.

Did this Ji Hongcheng have a one-track mind? How could he accompany the Emperor on a hunting trip and steal the limelight from him?

The Hou Zhu was rendered speechless for a time. He raised his eyes and looked in the direction where he came. He saw several imperial guards riding horses and struggling to drag a humongous, hill-like object towards them.

Ji Hongcheng not only hunted a tiger, but also a sturdy and tall adult fierce tiger.

The Hou Zhu then glanced at his pile of elks and goats scattered around and felt sick of them.

This man surnamed Ji really spoiled the fun.

“This being the case, you, dear subject, is considered the best hunter. I should reward you handsomely.”

Ji Hongcheng exercised no modesty at all and responded loudly, “Thank you, Your Majesty!”

The Hou Zhu gnashed his teeth, wishing he could kill him.

“In that case, I’ll give you a job.” He sat on his horse and looked down at Ji Hongcheng. His tone was light, but his teeth were clenched.

“Jingwang went to chase a stag in the forest just now, but he hasn’t returned yet. I’m worried about him, so you go and find him back. You’ll be heavily rewarded.”

The Hou Zhu looked up at the sun that was gradually sinking down the mountain and decreed.

An entire day had passed. Looking at the weather, it was time to collect his Fifth Brother’s corpse. Let Ji Hongcheng take over this unlucky task. While he was at it, he would condemn him to death for the crime of failing to protect Jingwang and causing him to die when the time came. He would execute this ignorant fool all together.

——

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Chapter 103

Jiang Suizhou was sitting on a rock by the stream. He watched Huo Wujiu sitting by the water cleaning the wound on his shoulder. Then he bandaged it again.

Jiang Suizhou forced him to do so. When they arrived at the water's edge, Huo Wujiu insisted on checking Jiang Suizhou's ankle first. Jiang Suizhou refused, insisting that he take care of his wound first.

Huo Wujiu could not resist him.

He stood up and pulled the robe that was hanging from his elbow towards his shoulder, then turned back and walked in front of Jiang Suizhou, glaring at him disapprovingly.

"You won't mess around this time, right?" he questioned.

Jiang Suizhou laughed. He let Huo Wujiu kneel on one knee in front of him and rested the foot he had sprained on his leg again.

"What are your plans?" Jiang Suizhou asked.

He watched Huo Wujiu lower his head and take off his shoes while answering, "Since Jiang Shunheng wants you dead, he won't let anyone come looking for you right away. I'll wait here until their people come, and then return in advance. In due course, just say that you fell off your horse and sprained your ankle and found this waterfront yourself. Those assassins are Pang Shao's people. Jiang Shunheng will never know about him cultivating private assassins, so he won't be suspicious.

Jiang Suizhou hummed in agreement: "I thought so, too."

Huo Wujiu put his shoes and socks aside and held the arch of his foot. Jiang Suizhou was born fair, and his feet never kissed the sunlight on normal days. At this point, his skin looked so white that they seemed to glow in the sun, and his blue veins loomed, making his skin even more transparent.

When Huo Wujiu gripped his foot with his rough palm, Jiang Suizhou inexplicably felt his ears burning up.

How strange.

Nonetheless, Huo Wujiu seemingly ignored it. He took action and examined his injury.

“Bear with it,” Huo Wujiu said.

Before Jiang Suizhou could respond, he was caught off guard with a bolt of pain under his hand. Jiang Suizhou took a sharp breath and heard the crack of a bone.

“There.” He heard Huo Wujiu say, “There will only be redness and swelling, but that can be eliminated in a few days.”

With that, he tore off the edge of one of his clothes, bandaged Jiang Suizhou’s ankle and put his shoe on.

Only Huo Wujiu himself knew how relieved he felt when the cloth covered that gleaming whiteness.

He straightened up and sat down beside Jiang Suizhou.

“What about later?” Jiang Suizhou asked, “Afterward, do you have any plans?”

This was what he had wanted to ask since earlier.

He knew that Huo Wujiu in that unofficial record could escape from Jingwang Manor and leave Southern Jing back to Northern Liang. There must be something unknown in the midst of it. Now that this matter could be advanced, Jiang Suizhou realized that he was involved with it.

If he hadn’t tried every possible way to find a doctor for Huo Wujiu, Huo Wujiu’s men wouldn’t have been able to seize the opportunity to find him. When Jiang Suizhou realized that due to his planning, he had accidentally merged with Huo Wujiu’s forces and helped him, Jiang Suizhou felt quite wonderful. He even felt an inexplicable joy that he could not suppress.

When Huo Wujiu glanced at him from the side, he discovered that Jiang Suizhou eyes were shining brightly, and that he was staring at him.

He knew what Jiang Suizhou wanted to ask. Not only was Jiang Suizhou not angry, but he was happy for himself. For a while, Huo Wujiu didn’t know whether he should be relieved or not.

Huo Wujiu should celebrate that his previous worries were all unfounded, but he felt a trace of loss again.

Huo Wujiu paused and said, “Next, I’m going to get you something to eat.” As if he didn’t understand what Jiang Suizhou was asking, he stood up seemingly unperturbed and poker-faced.

“No, I mean…” Jiang Suizhou inserted quickly.

“I know what you want to say.” Huo Wujiu said, “However, didn’t you also say that you want me to protect you?”

Jiang Suizhou was a bit confused about what the connection was, so he only responded, “Yes.”

Huo Wujiu leaned down and picked up Jiang Suizhou’s sword. When he lowered his head, he found Jiang Suizhou looking at him with a puzzled expression.

With traces of helplessness in his eyes, Huo Wujiu raised his hand and patted Jiang Suizhou on the head.

“If I want to leave at this juncture, of course, I can leave anytime,” he said. “But, won’t Jiang Shunheng look for you to settle the score?”

He would seek him.

Jiang Suizhou decided to keep his mouth shut.

“So, I don’t have much of a plan.” He said, “If I stay here and see what happens, I can always wait for the opportunity to uncover their weaknesses. By then, our forces inside and outside can coordinate. This way, we can catch them off guard and also show them what it means to invite the wolf into the house.”

When Jiang Suizhou heard this, he tittered.

“The idiom to invite a wolf into the house doesn’t fit you,” he said.

“I don’t want to be a good guy either.” Huo Wujiu washed his sword in the stream, then said to Jiang Suizhou, “Wait for me here. I’ll be back in a moment.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded in response. He then watched as Huo Wujiu gripped his sword in one hand and headed for the forest.

His smile gradually disappeared, but his eyes latched on Huo Wujiu’s back. Jiang Suizhou didn’t avert his gaze until Huo Wujiu disappeared into the forest.

Jiang Suizhou knew deep inside that although Huo Wujiu said offhandedly that he wanted to collaborate inside and outside and let the Hou Zhu lead the wolf into the house, he knew that the easiest and simplest way for Huo Wujiu was to head back to Northern Liang.

He was an invincible general. His army was his hands and feet, the sharp edge in his hands.

But now, it was himself, who had bound his limbs.

Huo Wujiu did not leave, only because he promised him.

Jiang Suizhou could not describe how he felt right now.

He always had to hold himself together, both before and after transmigrating. Before transmigrating, he had parents, but his father had

lovers and children, while his mother had only his father in her eyes.

Now, he seemed to possess riches and honor, but in fact, Jiang Suizhou was treading a tightrope. So many people kept an extra eye on him covetously, while many others relied on him. He was left with no choice.

But currently…

There was a man who was willing to bind his limbs, throw away his sword, and bear disgrace and a heavy burden in the hands of his enemies, just because he had promised to protect him.

Jiang Suizhou no longer seemed to be alone.

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Chapter 104

Huo Wujiu did return soon.

He had his sword in one hand, with blood dripping from it. He was holding some dry dead branches, and carried a snow-white rabbit, which was already out of breath, in his other hand.

Huo Wujiu walked to the riverside by Jiang Suizhou's side, squatted down, and quickly peeled off the skin at the water's edge.

What he was holding in his hand was clearly a three-foot-long sword, but this didn't get in the way at all. His movements were neat. Jiang Suizhou sat on the side and watched curiously. In no time, the rabbit was clean as a pin, and he placed it on the clean stone beside him.

After doing this, he picked up the pile of dead branches again.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but comment, "How come you're good at everything?"

Huo Wujiu looked up at Jiang Suizhou and saw him sitting on the stone next to him quite obediently. He was clearly wearing a neat arrow-sleeved riding outfit, but he couldn't hide the peculiar bearing of a rich and noble gentleman. Here in the wilderness with no people around, Jiang Suizhou sitting there was akin to a piece of jade that had been dropped in the wild.

Those eyes which were confined in the rich town from morning till night found everything fresh.

Huo Wujiu was his opposite. He had been wild since he was a child. Yangguan was bleak and desolate and had no space for leisure. Whenever he went out to play with others when he was young, they would go horse

riding, hunting, catching rabbits, and shooting wild geese. The animals they caught were roasted on the spot to eat. Other than those, there was no other entertainment.

Later, he marched and fought with his father for years, and the conditions were naturally more difficult than in Yangguan. On the march, they always ate whatever was available, so it was common to roast their catch.

He was only capable of killing a rabbit at present, but in the eyes of this prince, it turned into ‘he could do anything’.

A smiles uncontrollably broke out on his face. Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes, took out a flint and slashed it with his sword. Sparks flew and landed on the pile of dead branches, igniting it.

Seeing Huo Wujiu laugh, Jiang Suizhou also felt a trace of embarrassment.

Come to think of it, he was a modern man who had never even butchered a chicken.

Huo Wujiu skewered the skinned rabbit and placed it above the fire. A few moments later, the aroma of meat filled the air, and the grease of the rabbit was roasted by the fire, producing sizzles on the skin.

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes couldn’t help but slide from the meat on the rack to Huo Wujiu’s face.

The sunrays were shining just right, brightly on Huo Wujiu. Before today, Jiang Suizhou had never seen Huo Wujiu stand up, let alone sit on the ground so casually but dashingly.

He was seriously good-looking. Presently, he seemed to have gotten rid of the heavy shackles that were pressing on him and had regained the light that belonged to him.

This was how Huo Wujiu was supposed to look.

After a while, Huo Wujiu noticed his gaze.

He raised his eyes to Jiang Suizhou and asked, “What’s wrong?”

Jiang Suizhou scrambled to avert his gaze.

“Nothing.” He was afraid of being found out so he quickly cooked up an excuse, “I was just thinking, after today, are you going to pretend that your legs aren’t healed?”

Huo Wujiu answered with a muffled hmm.

“I can’t let anyone notice until we’re ready to take action,” he added.

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“So what do you have in mind for the time being?” he asked.

Huo Wujiu pondered for a moment.

“Do you know Lou Yue?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou certainly knew him.

A rare and famous general of Southern Jing, who was once a close friend of the former Marquis Huo.

But back then, Emperor Jing You intended to eradicate the Huo family. Only then did the Huo family rise up and rebel, from being a prestigious general’s family of the Jing Dynasty to the rebels who overthrew the old Dynasty. Lou Yue had nothing to do with this matter. At that time, he went south to sweep the Japanese pirates. It was thousands of miles away, so he stayed in Southern Jing.

Both Emperor Jing You and the Empress knew of his friendship with Lord Huo, so they dared not use him. As far as the history books were concerned, Huo Wujiu sent his troops south to Lin’an, but the Hou Zhu never allowed Lou Yue to go to the battlefield.

Three days before the city collapsed, the Hou Zhu confiscated all of Lou Yue’s military power and executed him.

Naturally, the Hou Zhu who attained all the soldiers under Lou Yue still failed to resist Huo Wujiu's invasion. Lou Yue was only executed because the Hou Zhu was not at ease with him and was afraid that he would collude with their enemies.

Remembering this, Jiang Suizhou paused.

He knew that Lou Yue had an only daughter named Lou Wanjun. After the fall of Southern Jing, Huo Wujiu saved her and took her in.

Since then, he had always brought Lou Wanjun by his side, even when he returned to guard Yangguan.

There were many traces in the history books about the relationship between the two of them. Lou Yue and the former Marquis Huo used to roam around together when they were young, and their children also had a verbal marriage contract. Huo Wujiu and Lou Wanjun were also considered childhood sweethearts.

Lou Wanjun lost her mother at an early age, and had been following her father's side, so she had been influenced by the environment. She was a rare general talent.

Nonetheless, Lou Yue was a conservative person and never let her go on the battlefield, let alone let her lead the soldiers. It was only after Lou Wanjun followed Huo Wujiu that she had the opportunity to go to battle. Henceforth, she left her name in the annals of history.

Although the two of them did not get married, whether in official records or unofficial history, everyone tacitly agreed that Lou Wanjun was Huo Wujiu's confidante, not to mention that Lou Wanjun had a son, whose father was unknown, but took Huo Wujiu's surname.

This was the information that Jiang Suizhou knew best. He had read no less than five papers related to this.

But for some reason, thinking about it now, an inexplicable feeling sprouted in his heart.

He could not identify what the feeling was, but in general, it wasn’t at all comforting.

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Chapter 105

He was lost in thought for a moment, until he heard Huo Wujiu's voice, then he snapped back to his senses.

"What's wrong?" He heard Huo Wujiu ask again.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly smiled, but somehow, the corners of his mouth felt a bit stiff. He smiled reluctantly and replied, "Of course I know him."

Huo Wujiu looked puzzled: "Have you two had a dispute?"

Jiang Suizhou shook his head, "No."

Huo Wujiu frowned at him and raised his eyes to the sky. "You look so pale. Are you suffering from a heatstroke?"

Jiang Suizhou had no idea why his complexion was unsightly. He didn't even notice it. He just suddenly felt uncomfortable. Perhaps the medicine that Gu Changyun administered to him had not yet dissipated, so it sometimes broke out.

He uttered, "I'm fine. Go on."

Huo Wujiu glanced at him and then said, "There is nothing to say, but I saved him by accident in the early years. Now I plan to ask for my favor."

He said it frankly, as if the matter of asking for a repayment under duress was very much on the table.

Jiang Suizhou forced down his discomfort and asked, "Are you sure he's willing to help you?"

Huo Wujiu looked at the snapping flames and replied, “Although he is loyal, he isn’t a fool. He should be clear about what kind of person Jiang Shunheng is. What’s more, nowadays, we and the Jing Dynasty have been in a life-or-death struggle for a long time. He should also think clearly and stand in a clear direction. ”

On this note, he said lightly, “Even if he doesn’t want to live, he has to think about his daughter.”

Jiang Suizhou was given a start.

Listening to Huo Wujiu’s words…

He and Lou Wanjun should have no personal relationship, right?

They were clearly talking about business, but for some reason, when he heard Huo Wujiu’s reply, the first thought in his mind was this.

He was stunned for a moment, and then felt chagrined.

What was he thinking? Whatever Huo Wujiu’s relationship with Lou Wanjun exactly was, it was none of his business…

Without warning, a burst of hot air came to his face.

When Jiang Suizhou looked up, he found Huo Wujiu holding a dead branch in one hand and handing him the rabbit that was roasted to a crispy, oily exterior.

“Did the sun render you silly, or is there something wrong with the medicine Li Changning prescribed for you?” He added, “Why are you in a daze? Eat quickly.”

——

Huo Wujiu’s craftsmanship was indeed satisfactory.

There was no seasoning in the wilderness, so he used fire alone to roast the rabbit so that it was crispy on the outside and juicy on the inside.

However, Jiang Suizhou had a small appetite and delicate stomach. He couldn't eat more after finishing a rabbit leg.

Most of the remaining rabbit meat went into Huo Wujiu's stomach.

When Jiang Suizhou finished eating, Huo Wujiu easily took on the task of cleaning up the surroundings. In no time, traces of fire were nowhere to be seen.

The sun gradually set.

Jiang Suizhou sat by the river, looking up at the gradually sinking daylight with boredom. The mountain scenery was dazzling, with the clean and gentle wind blowing. He had never been so leisurely after he came here.

However, he couldn't help but say, "His Majesty is too cruel. It's been half a day, yet he still hasn't sent anyone to collect my corpse."

Huo Wujiu, who was sitting next to him, burst out laughing, "He is also afraid of wasting all previous efforts."

Jiang Suizhou suddenly thought of something and hastily asked, "By the way, you've been out for so long. You won't be discovered, right?"

Huo Wujiu said, "No, they are all in the hunting ground and won't go back to the camp. Moreover, didn't I ask you to lock me in the room today?"

Jiang Suizhou looked at him: "Did you know something would happen back then?"

Huo Wujiu answered deep inside, *I knew as early as when I heard you were going to accompany them to the hunt.*

But before today, those speculations were just worries. They didn't count. Huo Wujiu didn't refute, and Jiang Suizhou took this as a tacit agreement.

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou felt a bit anxious.

“Why don’t you go back?” He said, “In case you are discovered, won’t you be in danger? I just need to wait for someone here now. I don’t need you to guard here.”

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes to him: “There are wolves in the mountain.”

Jiang Suizhou froze, unable to make a sound.

“They want to build a hunting ground, so they also keep some tigers here,” Huo Wujiu went on to say.

Jiang Suizhou was rendered silent.

Seeing his reaction, the corners of Huo Wujiu’s lips involuntarily curled, and his wicked nature began to rear its head.

“Are you not afraid?” he asked, and made a move to stand up, “Then should I leave?”

In a panic, Jiang Suizhou quickly stretched out his hand and grabbed his clothes.

“Don’t!” he exclaimed.

Huo Wujiu stood at a distance, with little expression on his face, but a dodgy yet composed streak flashed across his eyes as he looked down at him.

His back was against the light and Jiang Suizhou failed to catch the playful tint in his eyes. What’s more, Jiang Suizhou forgot that this young one had crawled and gone through challenging experiences in the barracks. No matter how decent he appeared, he carried the wicked nature of a ruffian deep in his bones.

Jiang Suizhou only thought that by keeping silent, it would really make Huo Wujiu think that he wasn’t afraid.

He raised his head to Huo Wujiu and spoke awkwardly, “… We’ve been here for a whole day. It’s not bad to stay a little longer.”

Although he spoke stubbornly, the lingering fear on his face was unmistakable.

Facing the sunset, Huo Wujiu naturally saw his expression clearly.

… This seemingly shrewd Jingwang really did not see that he was teasing him.

He had watched this strategist in the court hall, and he didn’t lose a beat after his battle with Pang Shao. How could he be so easy to deceive here?

With those clean eyes alone, Huo Wujiu’s heart melted. It was as if the cool evening wind in the mountains in early summer was blowing to the bottom of his heart.

The hand holding the corner of his clothes was obviously powerless, but Huo Wujiu sat down obediently with that strength.

“I’m teasing you.” Huo Wujiu’s voice hinted at a compromise. His hands moved, ignoring all commands, and rubbed the top of Jiang Suizhou’s head.

His strength was gentle yet tense.

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Chapter 106

The night fell heavily.

The mountains were unlike the Jingwang Manor where as soon as the sky got dark, they would light up the lanterns around, illuminating every corner. In the mountains, as soon as it was dark, everywhere turned dark. Insects chirped somewhere in the grass, and the stars scattered all over the sky also floated high up above.

However, it also allowed the sound of horses' hooves in the forest to reverberate.

Jiang Suizhou naturally lacked Huo Wujiu's keen hearing, and only felt silence in all directions. All that remained was the gurgling water and the insects in the grass.

Jiang Suizhou was chatting about inconsequential topics with Huo Wujiu, but his lips kept curling up involuntarily, as if this kind of tediously long wait was an interesting matter for him.

He thought, Perhaps because this is something I've never dared to think of.

How dare people who studied history imagine that one day they would have a face-to-face conversation with someone from thousands of years ago? A hero, who stamped his name on pages of history and known to women and children, was sitting beside him, talking about something related to how his father, Marquis Huo, relied on his learned and knowledgeable military mentor, but he couldn't read a couple of words; that he would doze off when reading a couple of books and such idle activities.

Jiang Suizhou slowly raised his eyes.

In the soft night breeze, the starry sky reflected in his eyes.

How splendid.

He wanted to turn his head to look at Huo Wujiu, but for some reason, a kind of nostalgic fear arose within him. He clearly had seen this person plenty of times and his figure was deeply embedded in his mind, but now he didn't dare look steadily at him.

It was as if one more glance would make him utter something he shouldn't and do something irrational.

He raised his eyes and quietly stared at the stars in the sky, listening to Huo Wujiu's languid voice nearby.

However, at this point, Huo Wujiu gradually stopped talking and did not make a sound.

Jiang Suizhou turned his head to the side after realizing this, and saw how Huo Wujiu's profile condensed in the dark.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly asked, "What's wrong?"

Huo Wujiu rose to his feet and replied in a whisper, "Someone is coming."

Then, he looked around and made sure that there was no trace of a second person around. He then whispered to Jiang Suizhou, "Just say what I told you today. Nothing will be revealed."

Jiang Suizhou responded without delay.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes for a closer look. Sure enough, in the far distance, tiny spots of fire gradually glowed. It should be the imperial guards who came to search for this missing Prince.

"There are many of them. They won't do anything to you in public," he added.

Jiang Suizhou said, "Then you…"

“I’ll head back and wait for you,” Huo Wujiu whispered.

Jiang Suizhou gazed at him nervously and nodded.

Huo Wujiu picked up his sword from where it was lying, handed it to him and said, “Put this away. I’m leaving.”

Jiang Suizhou responded with a hum. He held the sword in his hand, but didn’t move. His eyes seemingly wanted to glance away, but failed miserably. Jiang Suizhou just looked up at Huo Wujiu and stared anxiously for a moment.

Huo Wujiu’s legs that were used to using qinggong also felt rather heavy.

He paused, bent down, wrapped his hand on the back of Jiang Suizhou’s neck and squeezed it gently.

“Don’t be afraid,” he comforted.

In the next second, without waiting for Jiang Suizhou’s nod, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and glanced deep into the forest. With the tap of his foot, he leaped several meters away and soon turned into a dark shadow, vanishing in another direction.

Jiang Suizhou fixed his gaze in that direction for a moment, before regaining his senses.

Huo Wujiu had always acted neatly and meticulously. At this time, there was no trace around him at all. Nobody would ever believe that another person was there.

If not for the warmth of Huo Wujiu’s hand lingering on the back of Jiang Suizhou’s neck, even he would have thought that everything was an illusion.

He couldn’t figure out why he felt a sense of loss deep inside. It was inexplicable, because it was clear that they would meet again soon.

Nevertheless…

He looked up at the starry sky once more.

The moon was hiding tonight, so the stars were especially shiny.

They were nothing but stars, and they would remain the same for a millennium or two milleniums from now. They were not worth watching.

Jiang Suizhou retracted his gaze with a lack of interest and locked his eyes on the firelights accompanied by hollers in the forest that were gradually approaching.

——

Ji Hongcheng admitted that he was extremely annoyed with Jingwang.

He followed General Lou and often went to Yangguan with him in his early years, and his friendship with the late Marquis Huo was very deep. The late marquis was righteous and forthright, and his only son Huo Wujiu was a natural talent. One might say he had no deep affection for the Huo family.

However, he was the same as General Lou. The Huo family rebelled, but they were treated as nothing more than outsiders. In terms of affection, they were close friends with the Huo family, but the Huos feud with the court was a family matter. Logically speaking, they were the subjects of the Jing Dynasty. As subjects, especially military generals, disloyalty to the sovereign was the biggest taboo.

Therefore, he and General Lou didn’t involve themselves in the Huo family’s uprising. Despite this, their hearts were more or less tangled.

Especially over the years when the imperial court became increasingly mediocre. In the past few years when Pang Shao came to power, people with discerning eyes witnessed all of it. Northern Liang was as majestic as the rising sun, while they, the entire court of Southern Jing, turned rotten to the core.

And these were all things that Ji Hongcheng could tolerate.

However, the only son left by the late Marquis Huo was actually defeated and captured. His Majesty preposterously did not kill him or imprison him, but went on to marry him off to that vicious and perverted Jingwang as his concubine.

The absurdity and disgrace of it all made Ji Hongcheng sit on pins and needles.

It was precisely because of this that he hated Jingwang, especially his smugness when humiliating Huo Wujiu. Therefore, he had blatantly delivered a letter to Jingwang Manor a few months ago. There were few key points on the letter, and most of it was cursing Jingwang.

But…

To say that he loathed Jingwang was not right either.

Maybe it was because at the palace banquet that day, Huo Wujiu had the opportunity to reply to him. It made him realize that his letter had really been sent to Huo Wujiu. This lessened his disgust with Jingwang somewhat.

Naturally, he didn't really want Jingwang to die.

However, after hearing the causes and consequences of Jingwang's disappearance, Ji Hongcheng's heart was at a loss.

With Jingwang's skin that could seemingly tear with the puff of wind, plus a mad horse that brought him into the forest, he would be considered lucky if Jingwang was left with an intact corpse after staying in the forest the entire day.

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Chapter 107

Ji Hongcheng's heart was somewhat heavy, but when the decree landed on his head, he naturally had to see the person, dead or alive. Even if Jingwang died, his corpse must be retrieved.

But, against all odds…

Jingwang's life was surprisingly blessed.

He led his men to search from dusk until late at night, and actually found Jingwang sitting in the forest by a stream.

Jingwang sprained his foot and sat there unable to move. When he spotted them coming, he raged and asked them why they arrived so late.

Ji Hongcheng was left astounded.

Jingwang… is His Highness only slightly injured?

He looked Jingwang up and down a bit and sat on his horse foolishly, staring straight at him.

Jiang Suizhou was somewhat speechless.

He was quite nervous just now, but when he saw Ji Hongcheng, he put his mind at ease.

This man wasn't part of Pang's party. Even if Ji Hongcheng hated him, he would never kill him on the spot or leave his corpse out in the wilderness.

It was thus clear that the Hou Zhu and Pang Shao firmly believed that he would die in the forest today.

However, although Ji Hongcheng was favorable, he was truly stupid. He stared blankly at Jiang Suizhou, unable to restrain his duplicitous act.

The man was stunned. ‘How come you’re not dead?’ was almost written on his black and ugly face like the portrait of Zhongkui (a deity supposed to chase off demons).

Jiang Suizhou sighed inwardly.

“Lord Ji.” He looked at Ji Hongcheng coldly and reminded him, “Are you disappointed that this Prince didn’t die?”

Only then did Ji Hongcheng snap back to his senses.

He didn’t admit it, but he didn’t deny it either. After all, although he didn’t want Jiang Suizhou to die, he really did not like him all that much either.

“Your Highness must be joking.” He bowed in obeisance with his hand cupped in the other before his chest on his horse, but his expression proud as hell. “I have been ordered to invite Your Highness back to camp. Come on, someone, why aren’t you helping Jingwang get on a horse?”

Jiang Suizhou was then supported by the surrounding guards. He sat on a horse, and was slowly brought all the way back.

At this time, the palace in the mountain was brimming with joy and excitement.

The ignorant Ji Hongcheng was sent to collect Jingwang’s corpse. As such, His Majesty won first place. No one mentioned a word about Ji Hongcheng, as if there was no such person. Presently, delicacies covered the tables, while wine cups went gaily around, celebrating His Majesty’s harvest today.

However, the Hou Zhu, Pang Shao and those who were in the know, were aware that this celebration meant something else.

The thorn in the Emperor’s side was finally removed.

Hence, the Hou Zhu was ecstatic. Even Pang Shao was happy, and they couldn’t help but toast a few more cups. Wined and dined to satiety, the Hou Zhu leaned in the arms of a beauty, looked drunkendly at the night outside the hall, and smirked.

His father adored that vixen concubine so much, so he sent that concubine six feet under to accompany him; their family couldn’t do away with a reunion, so today, he sent their favored child under to accompany them.

The Hou Zhu smiled and drowsily downed another cup.

But at that moment, he spotted a crowd that gradually came into view in the dark.

Little by little, the lively hall quieted down.

Everyone looked out the door.

They saw Jingwang limping, supported by the servants beside him, slowly climbing up the long step. Ji Hongcheng, who was following behind him, sported a dark joyful face, waiting to receive his reward.

The crowd watched Jingwang enter. His coat and outer robe were torn and stained with dust. He looked very disheveled, but brimming with vigor.

He stopped in the hall and bowed to the Hou Zhu.

“This younger brother is late, please forgive me, Imperial Brother,” he apologized.

Pang Shao’s complexion changed dramatically, while the golden cup in the Hou Zhu’s hand crashed to the ground with a clang.

——

Pang Shao couldn’t care less about anything else, and after saying that he was going to change his clothes, he got up and left the main hall.

Outside the hall, the subordinates in his entourage stood tremblingly in the shadows, waiting for him to come and ask questions.

“How could this be!” Pang Shao muttered under his breath. He shot a furious stare and asked violently.

One of the men responded without delay, “Master, this servant doesn’t know! Jingwang did go in that direction. I sent a few more people just to be sure, including Tang Gui! But…”

“But what?” Pang Shao gritted his teeth. “But Jingwang came back unscathed?”

The man shivered and spoke almost in a whisper, “And… the people we sent, even Tang Gui… did not return.”

An eerie silence settled.

“Tang Gui also did not return?” Pang Shao’s voice gradually calmed down, but it became more and more creepy.

The man didn’t dare to respond.

Over the years, his master had eliminated dissidents. There were some operations that couldn’t be done openly, so his master spent many years of energy, spending money like water, only to cultivate these assassins.

Among them, Tang Gui was the most outstanding, his master’s most powerful one.

But now, even Tang Gui…

“Good.” He heard Pang Shao’s voice between gnashed teeth.

The man instinctively looked up and saw his master standing in the shadow outside the hall with his face heavy enough to drip water.

“It’s him, Jiang Suizhou, who’s capable,” Pang Shao commented.

“Send someone quickly and immediately. Send one batch to the forest and be sure to find traces and bodies. As for the other batch…”

Pang Shao raised his eyes and looked into the hall.

The light inside was bright and warm, as golden and resplendent as a divine palace. Jingwang was standing upright there. His back was slender, and although dressed in a wretched state, his figure glowed like that of a deity.

Pang Shao scoffed.

“While he’s here, immediately send someone to follow me to his courtyard. Today, I must find out the reason from his place.”

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Chapter 108

Jiang Suizhou stood ramrod straight in front of the Hou Zhu. Although he was expressionless, he was quite calm and composed deep inside.

Want to kill me? Sorry, you probably don't know what kind of butcher's knife is hanging around your neck.

That person not only can save me, but also can kill you.

With this in mind, for a rare moment, Jiang Suizhou directly sized up the Hou Zhu with an offensive stare.

Although this dead fatty was poisonous, he was stupid. Whatever mood he had was all written on his face, and this time, his complexion couldn't be anymore unsightly.

He clenched his teeth in bitter hatred and couldn't find his voice for a long time, staring fixedly at Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou was oblivious to it. At the perfect moment, he revealed a sprinkle of doubt: "Imperial Brother?"

After hearing this, the Hou Zhu gritted his teeth and spoke.

"Fifth Brother, you're finally back," he bit, "But you really made this Elder Imperial Brother worry."

Jiang Suizhou responded with an embarrassed smile, but it was quite piercing when it fell into the Hou Zhu's eyes.

"Thank you for your concern, Imperial Brother," he replied, "It's also this younger brother's incompetence in controlling a horse."

The glare in the Hou Zhu's eyes was malevolent. It was as if he was itching to kill him with his sword right in the hall.

Still he asked, "Fifth Brother, what happened to you in the forest today?"

Jiang Suizhou sighed pretentiously.

"My horse somehow went mad halfway through its gallop," he narrated, "This younger brother couldn't control it, so it kept galloping. I couldn't stop it at all."

The Hou Zhu stared at him: "Then how did it stop?"

Jiang Suizhou smiled as if he couldn't perceive the malice in his eyes and said in a low voice, "On the way, the horse bumped into a dead tree and broke its neck. It was then that I stopped. I just paid no attention when I fell off the horse and sprained my foot, so I could only wait where I was. Fortunately, Imperial Brother sent someone to rescue me in time."

Speaking of this, he inadvertently smiled and sighed with emotion: "It's really God's mercy that I got out of the jaws of danger."

The words 'God's mercy' that fell in Jiang Shunheng's ear rang several thousand points of mockery.

He expected so much, but in the end, the man didn't die. He really lost his esteemed dignity. What was more, it gave him a kind of nest of fury from losing what he had just obtained.

And for various reasons, it was God's mercy for this invalid!

The Hou Zhu was so furious he breathed unevenly. He sat on his imperial throne gasping for breath. He clutched his wine cup, wishing he could sweep all the objects on the table to the ground.

… Pang Shao, it's Pang Shao!

His uncle promised him repeatedly before. He said that this time, he would never leave Jingwang any chance of survival! He said that he would take

care of everything, set nets above and snares below, and would certainly let Jingwang ‘accidentally’ die in the forest. He didn’t have to worry about anything. He just needed to call Jingwang to his side and whip his horse.

But he didn’t die at all!

The Hou Zhu was so enraged that he could hardly speak. For a while, his eyes blurred before he finally found an excuse and went around to find Pang Shao.

He had to ask Pang Shao to give him an explanation.

Only,his eyes wandered around, but Pang Shao’s seat was empty. Even the servants who served next to him were gone to who knew where.

“Where is Uncle?” The Hou Zhu ignored Jiang Suizhou and asked with a cloudy face. “He said he just went to change clothes. Why hasn’t he returned yet after such a long time?”

No one around answered.

The Hou Zhu merely thought he dreaded punishment for his crime so he hid away.

He had trusted his uncle since he was young, and likewise, his uncle had been doing things that were worthy of his trust.

But over the past few days, the Hou Zhu didn’t know whether his uncle was getting older or for some other reason, he had become increasingly disappointing.

He secretly coveted the money he should have spent on constructing an ancestral temple, and privately assassinated old ministers in the court. Even his relatives went so far as to send his imperial robes to his house behind his back.

The Hou Zhu couldn’t care less about the money, the old ministers and a mere robe. What he couldn’t accept was that his uncle, who had always

been sincere to him, deceived him and took advantage of him, displaying two different faces in front and behind him.

It made him feel humiliated and uneasy at the same time.

Today he trusted him so much, yet he actually…

For a time, silence reigned in all four corners. No one dared to make a sound, but they all stealthily caught a glimpse of the unsightly complexion of His Majesty on the seat.

Just then, a servant sprinted all the way in and knelt in front of the main seat.

“Your Majesty!” The servant knelt on the ground and reported, “I am a servant beside the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister has just gone out on an urgent matter and asked me to come and report to Your Majesty!”

The Hou Zhu’s face remained cold.

“Urgent matter?” He repeated, “What other urgent matters does he have?”

The man kneeling replied, “Your Majesty, the Chief Minister said that something’s odd in His Highness Jingwang’s courtyard, so he wants to bring someone to go and investigate personally!”

——

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Chapter 109

A regiment of imperial guards carried lamps and marched up the mountain, lighting up the narrow and delicate mountain paths.

Those pieces of light poured noisily into the courtyard where Jingwang was staying.

Meng Qianshan was sitting in the courtyard, taking a nap.

The Prince went down the mountain without taking anyone, and somehow locked Madam Huo in his room, leaving only the medicine boy who came along dressed as a servant. Meng Qianshan had nothing better to do and nowhere to go, so he could only wait under the veranda for the Prince’s return.

This wait lasted till the sky darkened and made him sleepy.

Just then, he heard a flurry of commotion.

He opened his eyes in a daze, and noticed a large bright light coming from the mountain road, heralding the Prince’s imperial guards. He quickly got up to meet them, but saw that the group of people broke through the door and entered. The leader, however, was the current Chief Minister, Pang Shao.

Meng Qianshan was startled and hurriedly went forward to salute.

“Greetings, Chief Minister! I, Meng Qianshan, am a eunuch in the entourage of His Highness Jingwang. I wonder why you have come late at night…”

Before he could finish speaking, a bodyguard stepped forward and shoved him aside.

The imperial guards were well-trained and aggressive. In the blink of an eye, they surrounded the yard so tightly that not even a mosquito could have slipped in.

“Search,” Pang Shao ordered in a deep voice.

He had already ordered his men on the way here.

He knew in his heart that the assassins he sent were all wiped out in the forest by either an elite brigade, or a supreme expert. Their imperial guards marched all the way to Tianping mountain, and because Huo Wujiu was present, his bodyguards and spies kept a close eye on Jingwang and his party at all times.

Everyone in the Prince’s residence were royal slaves, and their exact detials were clean.

If Jingwang’s people were definitely not in the attendant team, they had to be following outside the entourage. If that was the case, they would certainly communicate for orders. As long as there were exchanges, there would be traces, letters, tokens, and even tools to transmit messages. There would be clues.

In an instant, with his order, the crowd rushed into the courtyard and began to rummage through boxes and cabinets in the surrounding rooms.

However, the group who went straight to the main room were blocked by the corridor.

“What’s the matter?” Pang Shao asked with a frown.

The guard by the corridor turned around and reported, “My Lord, the door of the main room… is locked.”

Pang Shao’s brows furrowed coldly. He strode towards the main room.

Seeing this, Meng Qianshan next to him hastily straightened up and followed him. With a smile, he spoke urgently, “My Lord, this is truly unfortunate. The Prince locked the door of the main room. He ordered that before he returns, no one can open this door…”

Pang Shaoli ignored him. He raised his hand and ordered someone to carry him away.

Meng Qianshan moved nimbly. He bent forward and escaped. In a few steps, he jumped in front of the door and blocked it.

He knew that even if the Prince and Madam Huo had quarreled in the morning, Madam Huo remained the person at the tip of the Prince’s heart. Who was Madam Huo? A prisoner of war from Northern Liang, while the person in front was the Chief Minister of Southern Jing.

Today, no matter whether this man was really here on official business or not, he would definitely make Madam Huo suffer once they met. If the Prince were present, he could still protect him a bit, but His Highness was absent…

He, as the servant, could only be obliged to do so and drag time out for as long as he could.

Upon seeing his response, Pang Shao’s brow furrowed.

Jiang Suizhou locked the door? That would be even more suspicious.

He sneered: “Why did His Highness lock this door?”

Meng Qianshan said: “Your Excellency, there are things this servant doesn’t know. His Highness can let Madam Huo stay by his side, but he’s most afraid of the consequences! This morning, His Highness was afraid that Madam Huo would make an escape once he’s taken into the wilderness, so he had someone lock Madam Huo tightly in the room. Except for him, no one is allowed to open the door!”

It was reasonable, but Pang Shao knew that he could not miss the slightest chance.

“Someone, drag him away,” he commanded coldly.

Meng Qianshan didn’t expect to be confronted by a master who refused to listen to others advice, so he latched onto the door and started kicking up a fuss, wailing mournfully, “Spare me, Your Excellency! His Highness has left a decree punishable by death. If this servant fails to guard this door, His Highness will have this servant’s head when he returns!”

Unfortunately, his two fists couldn’t fight against four. In a blink of an eye, he was dragged aside and firmly held in place.

Several guards smashed the door with all their strength, and with a few consecutive loud bangs, the door abruptly slammed open.

The crowd rushed into the room. Pang Shao also followed and stepped in.

The room was quiet. Candles were shining all around, and the tall figure, sitting in a wheelchair, raised his eyes and considered him silently.

Huo Wujiu.

As soon as Pang Shao’s eyes fell on Huo Wujiu, an inexplicable hunch sprang up in his heart.

The servants beside Jingwang were indeed innocent and had little skill, but he had forgotten about this one.

Although he had a few spies in Jingwang’s backyard, Jingwang was overly cautious and did not allow him to stuff people into the yard where he was staying.

Hence, news about Huo Wujiu was cut off ever since he locked him up.

That being the case…

Could it be that Jiang Suizhou is keeping Huo Wujiu by his side, and it is Huo Wujiu who rescued him today?

Although Pang Shao considered this possibility as unlikely, if it were Huo Wujiu, then everything could be explained.

After all, there were few people in the whole world who could rival his servant, Tang Gui. He would never believe that Jiang Suizhou was capable of cultivating such people.

Pang Shao stared closely at him as if to capture a clue from him.

Huo Wujiu quietly raised his head and looked straight at him.

“Is something the matter?” Huo Wujiu inquired breezily.

Pang Shao stared at him for a good while. After a moment, a smile gradually spread across his face.

“Nothing,” he replied, “I was just thinking, it’s a real pity. If you can still stand up with your legs, General Huo, I think you would have been an expert who could defeat ten against one.”

When he uttered ‘ten to one’, he slowed down his speech and spoke meaningfully.

Huo Wu Jiu glanced at him lightly, then dropped his eyes and didn’t respond to him.

Just that one needle-like glance made Pang Shao’s entire body tense.

He felt the humiliation of being condescendingly despised.

“I have a suspicion today, and I need you to solve it,” he spoke unhurriedly.

Fortunately, he was well prepared. When they headed to the courtyard, he brought an imperial doctor with them. When the imperial doctor heard his words, he immediately stepped forward and stood by his side.

He didn’t notice, however, that Huo Wujiu’s expression imperceptibly condensed with his eyes down, as if struck by what he heard.

After a momentary pause, he kept his head lowered, and then looked up, staring at Pang Shao.

One corner of his mouth curled up, and he let out a contemptuous smirk.

“Are you worthy?”

These three words reached the ears of the densely packed imperial guards in all four corners.

Pang Shao only felt a roar in his head. All night, the disbelief at the failure of his plot, the fury at the loss of his beloved general, the apprehension about the Emperor’s reaction, and the anger out of shame toward Jingwang all felt like a spark landing on a pile of dry wood.

It exploded.

Pang Shao laughed grimly.

He had to pretend in front of Jingwang, to act humble in front of the Emperor’s eyes, and now, to be scorned by this defeated general?

He waved his hand to let the imperial doctor he had brought retreat, walked forward, raised his legs and kicked Huo Wujiu’s wheelchair.

“I just want to confirm if your legs are indeed broken.”

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Chapter 110

Pang Shao was no longer young after all. Moreover, he was a civil servant who hardly carried things on his shoulders and hands, so his strength was even more puny.

He kicked the wheelchair, and the wheelchair shook, but it didn’t move.

The surroundings suddenly fell silent.

The snicker from the wheelchair was especially pronounced.

Pang Shao looked down and saw Huo Wujiu sitting in the wheelchair. His head was hanging low with his eyes raised, lazily regarding him.

That snicker came from him.

Pang Shao’s eyes widened in wrath, and ire showed on his face.

The surrounding guards didn’t dare to watch the show anymore. They rushed forward, pulled Huo Wujiu up from his wheelchair, and flung him to the ground.

The dull sound of flesh crashing to the ground finally calmed Pang Shao’s anger a bit.

Everyone saw it.

Huo Wujiu’s legs couldn’t move at all, let alone exert force. With the guards’ strength, he was hurled to the ground. His legs even got stuck in the wheelchair, overturning it.

Everyone could see that his legs were simply useless.

In the ordinary course of events, once Pang Shao found out that there was nothing unusual about him, he should have continued to search around. However, Huo Wujiu's scorn and look just now ignited the anger that Pang Shao had accumulated overnight.

For a while, he lost a few moments of sanity.

He looked down at Huo Wujiu, who had fallen heavily to the ground, and felt a rush of pleasure deep within. However, he was also dissatisfied with his silence.

People who so obviously were buried in the dust should not have such a hard backbone.

Pang Shao strolled forward, raised his foot, and stepped on Huo Wujiu's leg.

The angle he sought was extremely tricky. It was the spot where Huo Wujiu was tortured and his meridians slashed that day. Although several months had passed, the affected area did not heal so quickly. Hence, in a few seconds, people even vaguely sniffed the stench of blood.

Wei Kai's eyes flushed, and his fists clenched when several imperial guards restrained him. He wanted to break free, but he also knew that he must not expose himself at this time.

However, Pang Shao, who was trampling on Huo Wujiu's leg, didn't have the time to pay attention to him.

He stared intently at Huo Wujiu on the ground, watching his face turn white. The veins on his neck were stretched taut, and cold sweat beaded on his forehead.

He felt that the muscles under his feet seemed to have lost their senses. Even when he stepped on them and rolled on them heavily, he could not feel any strength or tension.

His legs were obviously crippled, but this wasn’t what he cared about at this time.

What he wanted to see was Huo Wujiu screaming in pain.

But Huo Wujiu didn’t even raise his head despite the trembling of his shoulders or uttered the slightest sound.

This greatly dissatisfied Pang Shao.

He continued to exert force under his feet, even stomping on Huo Wujiu’s legs and crushing them heavily.

But the man still didn’t make a sound.

Pang Shao felt a smothering flame deep inside. The flames blazed ceaselessly, but the more it smothered him, the more upset he became.

Without warning, he raised his foot, and then violently stomped straight on Huo Wujiu’s injury once more.

But at that moment, he heard the voice of the Hou Zhu from behind him.

“Pang-qing[1], what are you doing?”

This was the first time the Hou Zhu had addressed him so distantly, and his voice reeked of displeasure.

——

The Hou Zhu asked this, naturally not because Pang Shao was bullying Huo Wujiu.

Rather, it was because the people behind him at this moment were the civil and military officials at the banquet. The moment the servant reported everything, everyone heard what Pang Shao was going to do. While they were exchanging glances, Jingwang grew anxious. He exclaimed that he was slandered and was innocent, and was going to confront Pang Shao.

It was merely a confrontation, but he also insisted that the civil and military officials should go and take a look together, to see what Pang Shao could search out to tarnish his innocence. His attitude of burning jade and stone alike made the Hou Zhu unable to refuse instead. Hence, he had no choice but to put a bold front and bring all the officials along.

In full view of everyone, they witnessed this scene.

Everything would have been fine if he had just done the search, but everyone witnessed how he stepped on Huo Wujiu's broken leg. He looked vicious as he vented his anger on the crippled man.

What a disgrace.

The Hou Zhu glared at Pang Shao, and over on the other side, Pang Shao promptly retracted his half-raised foot. He quickly turned around and looked at the Hou Zhu.

"May Your Majesty be the judge! I only suspect that Huo Wujius legs are not completely broken, that's why… that's why…"

"So, did this number of people find anything?"

Before the Hou Zhu could speak, Jiang Suizhou, who was on the side, suddenly stood out.

In an instant, all eyes that were wandering around fell on him.

Jiang Suizhou's icy gaze was fixed unwaveringly on Pang Shao.

"Did his legs move?" Jiang Suizhou questioned word by word.

Pang Shao could not string a word for a while.

Jiang Suizhou didn't want to give him a chance to speak at all.

"If you want to investigate, you had brought a doctor behind you, so why didn't you use him?" Jiang Suizhou then asked, "What's more, his legs were broken with my Imperial Brother as a witness himself. He also had

him diagnosed and treated by imperial doctors, and there has been no improvements for a long time. Yet here you are out of the blue. Do you doubt that my Imperial Brother has given this waste a feeble thread of life, or that this Prince found a celestial being? What intention do you think I have to cure this cripple?”

His cold voice echoed in a quiet room. Perhaps in his rush to speak, he couldn’t even breathe evenly afterward. Before he could finish his tirade, he started coughing.

Meng Qianshan, whom the guards restrained, anxiously struggled to get up. However, the two pairs of iron-like arms that clamped him made him unable to move no matter how much he struggled.

His master’s cold expression remained. He stopped coughing, glanced at Pang Shao viciously, and declared, “This Prince feels like vomiting at a mere glance at this good-for-nothing. If you want to kill him, you can take him away and kill him. Don’t use him to slander this Prince.”

Pang Shao immediately shot a glance at the Hou Zhu.

But the Hou Zhu only frowned. His face spoke of impatience and annoyance, and he didn’t spare him a glance.

The Hou Zhu was more than annoyed at this point.

Although Jingwang didn’t die, he could still toy with him to amuse himself, not to mention his increasingly ailing body. His days were numbered. To him, this was merely a bit of a disappointment, but Pang Shao’s move disgraced him.

Footnote:

1 卿- qing – term used by the emperor for his subjects

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Chapter 111

He carried out such a farce and also allowed so many courtiers whom they had to see every day as witnesses. It seemed that he, Pang Shao, was cranky and incompetent. On this account, if he were to appoint him in the future, he too would appear incompetent.

The Hou Zhu felt that his pleasure on this trip was greatly spoiled, which annoyed him.

“Your Majesty…” Pang Shao spoke hastily.

The Hou Zhu gave him a disinterested glance. He flicked his sleeves, and turned away.

Pang Shao followed after the ministers without delay and trailed in haste.

Jiang Suizhou stood in the distance, not moving. He watched the room full of high officials and imperial guards in the courtyard following by Jiang Shunheng’s side, whooping and hollering as they moved away.

The courtyard gates were then closed again.

Only then did he turn his head and look at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu watched the bunch disperse, and it was not until they were far away that he was sure that the place was safe again. He looked up at Jiang Suizhou. Before he could speak, Jiang Suizhou also lowered his head and stared straight at him.

His Highness Jingwang, who sported an icy visage just now and shot daggers at him moments ago, now had a pair of eyes glowing a bit red and glistening with tears seemingly due to coughing.

Huo Wujiu's throat rolled and he was about to tell him that he was fine.

However, Jiang Suizhou took a deep breath, turned his head to Meng Qianshan who had flung himself at his side, forced his voice to be calm, and slowly ordered, "Everyone go out and close the doors behind you."

Huo Wujiu knew that it was because of the crowd in the courtyard.

Meng Qianshan looked at him worriedly, but he didn't dare to go against his will. He even hurriedly dragged Wei Kai, who retreated three steps, away.

The moment the room door closed, Huo Wujiu watched Jiang Suizhou walk quickly toward him, squatted down and took hold of his arm.

"Are you all right?" Jiang Suizhou's voice rang with a subtle tremor. His eyes carried a watery glow as he stared closely at him. "Your legs have just been healed. If they're injured yet again, can you still stand up?"

Huo Wuhiu didn't know which question to answer first.

"I'm fine, don't be afraid." After a pause, he lifted his hand and smoothed Jiang Suizhou's hair.

"But I can smell blood on you."

Hearing Jiang Suizhou's words, Huo Wujiu quickly stretched out his hand and pulled Jiang Suizhou up along with him.

He slowly comforted him under his breath, "I'm all right, but the wound on my shoulder has torn open. Li Changning gave me medicine that can be taken orally. My meridians have been cured and it's easy to avoid accidents. My legs are fine and all right."

Jiang Suizhou immediately looked over Huo Wujiu's shoulder.

Then he saw that his robe had long been soaked with blood. At this time, a faint dark color drenched it.

His wound was torn open when he was hurled to the ground earlier.

Since he had crashed to the ground, he crouched down and covered his injury quite well. Coupled with Pang Shao's rage, people's eyes only fell on his legs, so no one noticed.

But this was nothing to Huo Wujiu.

Pang Shao came prepared, not only with soldiers, but also with an imperial doctor. His legs were already healed, and if he were to let an imperial doctor check them again, he would definitely be exposed, plus he heard the sound of people approaching outside the courtyard. Moreover, it sounded like there were many people, so he chose to provoke Pang Shao to hit him in a fit of rage, avoiding having the doctor take his pulse to check his injuries.

For him, it was just a small tear, and it was a good trade off.

But Jiang Suizhou in front of him obviously thought differently.

He raised his hand, originally wanting to touch him, but in fear of hurting him any further, his hand hung in place and dared not move forward.

All he felt was the sore tip of his nose.

He knew all too well that Huo Wujiu suffered from this injury to save him. And just now Pang Shao abused him like that, not because Huo Wujiu was part of an enemy state, but because he, Jiang Suizhou, did not die.

All because of him.

Somehow, this knowledge made Jiang Suizhou feel particularly uncomfortable. Huo Wugou has been well, he could have gone, but now because of him, so many more misfortunes have arisen for nothing.

His chest felt so suffocated that he felt pain in bursts, even to the point that it was unbearable.

"It's my fault," he whispered a moment later.

This time, Huo Wujiu heard the choke in his voice.

Huo Wujiu was instantly thrown into a panic.

It's no big deal. Why is he so aggrieved?

He anxiously said, "I don't blame you. I'm really okay. It's not a serious injury, nor is it fatal. Besides, even if he didn't hit me, I would have torn it accidentally in my sleep at night. It's not a problem."

But then Jiang Suizhou raised his head, and the tears in his eyes could not be contained.

"The imperial doctors here are unreliable. There are no other doctors here, so you can't stay any longer." The choking in his voice worsened. He took a deep breath, as if to hold himself back and make his tone appear calm. However, the effect was anything but satisfactory.

"Let's go home tomorrow," he uttered.

Huo Wujiu only felt that a certain string in his heart was ruthlessly plucked.

It felt sick at heart and swollen. It was plain to see that the person in front of him was distressed. He felt sorry for him and was flustered, but for some reason, Huo Wujiu felt that his heart was filled with something. It was hot and dense, as if something finally found a place to land.

He was about to speak, but then Jiang Suizhou's eyes blinked, and a tear slid uncontrollably down his cheek, bringing a flutter to his eyelashes.

Huo Wujiu couldn't hold himself back any longer.

He raised his uninjured arm, wrapped his hand around Jiang Suizhou's neck, pressed him forward, and used one hand to force him into his embrace.

"All right," he whispered, "Let's go home tomorrow."

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Chapter 112

Early the next morning, Jiang Suizhou complained about being ill and wanting to return to the capital in advance.

Perhaps due to the turbulence last night, the Hou Zhu was out of sorts and in a foul mood. He was entirely disinterested, so when he heard someone reporting that His Royal Highness Jingwang was ill, he readily permitted his return with a wave of his hand.

Jiang Suizhou was indeed ill.

After he went to bed that night, he secretly planned to be so. They had to return home the next day, so since he wanted to leave in advance, he had to find an excuse.

The best excuse, of course, was his health.

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou did not hesitate much, nor did he discuss with Huo Wujiu. He secretly opened the window in the night, removed his quilt, and just laid there all night.

He didn’t fall asleep until late at night because of the cold.

He stayed awake for most of the night. His head was clear, and he began to muse about matters all over the state. He mulled over Pang Shao’s affairs over and over again, and considered his plans in the future. Then his thoughts drifted to Huo Wujiu.

For some reason, when he thought about Huo Wujiu, he felt as if his cheeks and his ears were a bit feverish.

He lifted his hand and gently patted his face with the back of his hand.

He could still picture how Huo Wujiu hugged him today.

He was truly a gutless coward. At the sight of blood, he shed tears for no reason. He desperately tried to bear it, but failed miserably. When he was embarrassed, he was pressed into his arms by Huo Wujiu. Just as he was feeling overwhelmed, Huo Wujiu pressed him into his arms.

It could be said Huo Wujiu hugged him, but it didn't seem to be. Nonetheless, Huo Wujiu did envelop his entire body. There was no mistaking the stench of blood, but Jiang Suizhou also felt his tight muscles and powerful heartbeat. It drummed against his chest and spread toward Jiang Suizhou.

Recalling all these, Jiang Suizhou closed his eyes and felt an inexplicable bashfulness.

It wasn't the kind of bashfulness he was disgusted with. On the contrary, it was something that made his heart race.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't tell exactly why. He just felt quite flustered deep inside, with a sprinkle of sweet bewilderment and nervousness.

He had never felt this way before.

These feelings made him toss and turn restlessly even more. Even with the cold breeze at night in the mountains, the heat on his face never abated until the second half of the night.

This time, he passed out in his sleep. When he was shaken awake by Meng Qianshan, he already had a high fever.

When he opened his eyes in a daze, he noticed Meng Qianshan nervously lying on the edge of the bed.

Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth and was about to speak when broke into a series of hoarse coughs.

Meng Qianshan hurriedly helped him sit up and said in a panic, "Please forgive me, Your Highness! I don't know why I forgot to close the window

for Your Highness last night. Now, you got sick from the cold! The imperial doctor will be here soon…”

But then Jiang Suizhou sat up and waved his hand.

“This Prince opened the window,” he was short of breath and spoke with panting. He first raised his hand and touched his forehead.

Wonderful. He was dizzy; his throat was itchy; his palms and forehead were hot; he must be suffering from a fever.

Indeed, his body wasn’t capable of anything else. Pretending to be ill was accurate.

A smile surfaced on Jiang Suizhou’s face.

When Meng Qianshan heard his response, along with his smile, he got all flustered. He exclaimed, “Your Highness…”

Jiang Suizhou raised his hand to interrupt him and said, “It’s nothing, this Prince has his own plans. Send someone to tell the Emperor that this Prince has a high fever and needs to return home to recuperate.”

Meng Qianshan agreed readily. Jiang Suizhou waved his hand and ordered, “Go quickly.”

He knew that they still had a long way to travel for their return to Lin’an from the mountains. If they delayed any longer, it would probably be midnight when they arrive.

Jiang Suizhou had no idea whether he could withstand the fatigue given his illness and disorientation.

Meng Qianshan hurriedly responded and sped away.

After sending Meng Qianshan away, Jiang Suizhou clutched the bed and coughed uncontrollably.

Then he saw a cup of steaming water handed to him.

He looked upward and saw Huo Wujiu's frosty front.

The smug look on Jiang Suizhou's face froze, and he even felt guilty inexplicably.

Before he could speak, Huo Wujiu leaned over and brought the water to Jiang Suizhou's lips along with his breath. He waited for him to drink without saying a word.

How could he let Huo Wujiu serve him?

But at this juncture, Jiang Suizhou was too weak to resist. He could only comply with Huo Wujiu's actions and drank a couple mouthfuls of water.

…It burned his mouth.

After a couple of sips, Jiang Suizhou declined to drink any more. Huo Wujiu's hand froze in place without any compromise.

Jiang Suizhou could only whisper, "It's hot."

He was sick, so his voice rang softer than usual. In addition, his lack of breath gave him a hint of petulance, which sounded rather squeamish.

Huo Wujiu paused, took back the teacup and put it on the table next to him.

"Is this the method you said will let us go home?" Huo Wujiu asked in a deep voice.

Huo Wujiu's tone was calm, but Jiang Suizhou noted his critiquing tone.

He fell silent for a moment and whispered sheepishly, "…Yeah."

Then, he hurriedly clarified, "After all, this method is more direct! Your injury needs bandaging and medication, and cannot be delayed any longer. I'm always sick too, so this isn't a big deal…"

Before he could finish his speech, a racking cough interrupted him.

His cough made him dizzy. All that filled Jiang Suizhou's ears was his hoarse cough, but he somehow vaguely heard a sigh.

The next thing he knew, a palm landed on his back like a compromise and slowly patted him.

——

However, other than that, he didn't hear Huo Wujiu say another word.

He sat next to him in silence, watching as the imperial doctor attended to him and waited for the men sent by Meng Qianshan to return with the imperial decree and pack up their luggage and carriage.

Jiang Suizhou was helped to change into his robes and got into the carriage; Huo Wujiu sat beside him the entire time. However, he never heard him speak again.

Jiang Suizhou was always a bit apprehensive.

Meng Qianshan brought a fur blanket to cover him. Jiang Suizhou huddled on the carriage seat and leaned sickly in the corner.

The mountain road was bumpy and the carriage was rocky, so when leaning against the carriage, he rocked and bumped along the way. Despite this, his eyes always drifted back to Huo Wujiu. He couldn't help wondering, *Is he angry?*

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Chapter 113

He shot several glances at Huo Wujiu, and after several times, Huo Wujiu caught him in the act.

Jiang Suizhou was sick and confused. When he locked into those bottomless black eyes without warning, he was startled.

Huo Wujiu regarded him quietly and asked after a while, “What’s wrong?”

Jiang Suizhou swallowed his saliva and whispered, “… Don’t be angry.”

Huo Wujiu’s figure stilled for a split second.

Then, he stood up from his wheelchair and marched over to Jiang Suizhou’s side and sat down.

“I’m not angry,” he denied.

“Then you…”

“But next time, when making a decision like this, shouldn’t you discuss it with me first?” Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou choked and lost his tongue for a moment.

After a while, he murmured inaudibly, “And you say you’re not angry…”

Huo Wujiu had a keen sense of sight and hearing, so he heard it loud and clear.

He sighed somewhat helplessly, reached out to check Jiang Suizhou’s forehead and said, “There are plenty of means. There’s no need for you to

harm your body.”

Jiang Suizhou stubbornly argued, “I’m used to being sick…”

It was the truth. When he came to this dynasty, his life could not be guaranteed. How could he care about whether he was sick or not? On the contrary, his weak physique could sometimes be used as a cover and sometimes as a weapon. He had no psychological and moral burden to use himself. When the situation called for it, he was naturally fearless.

However, Huo Wujiu interrupted him.

“It’s nice to be sick, isn’t it?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou snapped his mouth shut and refused to say a word.

Huo Wujiu continued, “If you’re unwell, why are you doing this? Just tell me straight, and there’ll always be another way.”

Jiang Suizhou was at a disadvantage. He knew that he was lacking in consideration, and he was also used to making his own decisions, so he never thought of discussing with Huo Wujiu.

He bowed his head and uttered a muffled hum sullenly.

He naturally didn’t know how aggravated he appeared in admitting his mistake, but in Huo Wujiu’s eyes, he looked a bit annoyed. Jiang Suizhou embodied a little pet that did something wrong. Huo Wujiu had just admonished him with a couple of sentences, and he pretended to be pitiful and wronged, like he was being bullied.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t withstand this appearance.

When he spoke again, he tried his best to soften his voice. Because Huo Wujiu never spoke softly to anybody, this soft voice rang quite awkwardly and clumsily.

“Even if I don’t take care of this injury, it’s not a problem. The wound isn’t deep, and there is no poison on the blade, nor any vital damage. Even

without treating it, it would heal."

Jiang Suizhou smiled and was about to speak, when Huo Wujiu beat him to it again.

"Don't talk back." Huo Wujiu spoke unforgivingly, "I know this much better than you."

That was true.

Although Huo Wujiu was still young, he had grown up on the battlefield. As a modern man, Jiang Suizhou had never seen any bloody battles at all. For a while, he felt like a disappointment. Throwing his concern into the mix led to chaos. It was nothing more than making a big fuss over a minor matter.

He zipped his lips shut.

Huo Wujiu paused for a couple of seconds, as if he was organizing his words, and then he spoke again.

"You felt bad when I got hurt yesterday, didn't you?" he stated.

Jiang Suizhou nodded his head.

Huo Wujiu carried on.

"I can feel you feeling bad for me. When you laid in the cold and drove yourself sick for my minor injury, how did you know I won't be uncomfortable?"

Although his tone sounded awkward, his words caught Jiang Suizhou off guard.

He stiffened and looked up at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu just sat there with his eyes cast down, looking cold and calm, and didn't look at him.

Jiang Suizhou was ill and all he could make out was a vague shadow of the man. Coupled with the rocky carriage, the image before his eyes was even less clear. Hence, he didn't see how stiff Huo Wujiu's body was. Huo Wujiu's cold gaze that was fixed at the corner of the carriage was motionless and brimming with tension.

This appearance was obviously a squirm to hide something.

After a while, he looked at Jiang Suizhou.

"Just take care of yourself," he said, "There's no need to harm yourself for me."

Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth and was about to speak.

But at this time, the carriage finally descended the mountain. This section of the road had not been repaired, and it had rained some days before, so the ground was rugged, especially after the grand ceremonial guard of the Hou Zhu rolled over them.

The carriage abruptly lurched. Jiang Suizhou knocked heavily on the carriage, slid to the side following the inertia, and then fell straight to the other side.

Jiang Suizhou felt as if his tender head had been mashed into dough.

But just in time, he plunged headfirst into a familiar embrace.

Warm, hard, with the unique steeliness of the muscles; there was also that heartbeat that was as steady as if all the sounds in the world disappeared, leaving behind only this beat.

Jiang Suizhou felt his heartbeat stop for a second.

He froze, only to feel the fever he felt last night come rushing back. It took him a while to recover, and he promptly supported himself to straighten up.

But an arm lifted up at that same moment, pressed on his shoulder and swept him backwards, keeping him in place.

The carriage was still bumpy, but the warm embrace and the hard carriage were entirely different.

Jiang Suizhou lost his voice in his throat.

Then with the vibration of the chest behind him, he heard Huo Wujiu's voice.

"All right, close your eyes. Sleep and we'll be there soon," he said.

Jiang Suizhou wasn't too sick to move, yet he didn't struggle anymore.

He was stunned for a moment, but somehow he obediently complied with his command and closed his eyes.

For a while, darkness fell before his eyes, and in the swaying carriage, the man surrounded him in a solid warmth.

He felt like a bird returning to his nest.

Jiang Suizhou might be afflicted with dizziness, but there was a moment of clarity in his divine consciousness, which made him suddenly want to understand something.

He seemed…to have fallen.

It seemed like… the matter about Jingwang's cut sleeve developed from fake to truth.

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Chapter 114

Because they did not travel with the Hou Zhu's ceremonial guards, their return journey was much faster.

At nightfall, the carriage stopped at the entrance of the royal residence.

Jiang Suizhou was already reeling.

He was already sick, so with the continuous swaying of the carriage, he spent the entire journey back to the manor in a groggy state. He couldn't even differentiate north from south.

Therefore, as soon as the carriage stopped, Meng Qianshan hurriedly trotted inside and ordered someone to find a doctor; Huo Wujiu sat in his wheelchair and watched the servants around him help Jiang Suizhou down from the carriage and put him on the palanquin.

For some reason, Huo Wujiu actually felt empty.

Maybe because he'd been hugging someone in his arms for a whole day that he'd been accustomed to his temperature. What's more, the man was more like a little creature nestled in his arms. All his heat seeped into his heart.

Now that the night wind was blowing, half of his body that was warm just now suddenly felt chilled.

Huo Wujiu sat in place motionlessly. It wasn't until Wei Kai came forward and pushed his wheelchair that he snapped back to his senses.

Just then, Meng Qianshan's voice echoed from the front, "Your Highness?"

Huo Wujiu immediately looked in that direction.

What he saw was Jiang Suizhou saying something in the palanquin. Meng Qianshan kept looking towards him, then he heard Meng Qianshan say, “Don’t worry, Your Highness. Madam Huo is here.”

Huo Wujiu clenched his fists in the wheelchair.

… *He’s seriously a fool.*

The party hurried Jiang Suizhou back to Anyin Hall while Wei Kai pushed Huo Wujiu into the courtyard.

At this time, Anyin Hall was already brightly lit. The maids in the yard hurried to and fro, all heading to the main room.

“Li Changning has already gone there. Don’t worry, General.” When Wei Kai saw Huo Wujiu looking in that direction, he whispered comfortingly behind him.

Still, he heard Huo Wujiu say, “Let’s go and take a look.”

Wei Kai knew where Huo Wujiu was going, but he didn’t refute when he heard the words. He just pushed Huo Wujiu’s wheelchair obediently to the main room.

Everyone in the room was busy. Because the Prince was always ill, the maids and manservants were experienced and moved about orderly.

Huo Wujiu raised his hand and waved Wei Kai back. He pressed his wheelchair and moved to Jiang Suizhou’s bedroom.

The servants didn’t bother to greet him, yet he didn’t add to the mess. He just stopped quietly in a corner near the bed and watched Li Changning diagnose and treat Jiang Suizhou.

The room was brightly lit, much brighter than the carriage. Therefore, Huo Wujiu also had a clear view of Jiang Suizhou’s burning red complexion.

Somehow, Huo Wujiu suddenly remembered the day he first came to Jingwang Manor.

At that time, he was covered with injuries, yet no one came into his cell to treat him. He could only hang onto his breath in the damp and cold prison. He was sent to Jingwang Manor for reasons he knew all too well, and was prepared to suffer further humiliation here.

However, all his expectations came to nothing. What greeted him was Jingwang who was watching over him under the lamp when he was running a high fever due to his injuries.

…*He truly is silly.*

He never asked him to do anything for him. Even if they stood in hostile camps, Huo Wujiu was always someone who kept track of those who offended him. He wouldn't really transfer his hatred for Jiang Shunheng to an idle Prince who couldn't resist Jiang Shunheng's will.

Nonetheless, this man just had to give him everything. He was truly simple. Unbeknownst to him, he paid too much effort and reaped his affection, which he shouldn't have.

Huo Wujiu looked at him quietly for a moment.

However, he really shouldn't have this kind of feeling.

After all, now that he was looking at this man, he felt as if the man was badly hurt. No one would dislike him, and he deserved suffering for him.

Huo Wujiu simply couldn't avert his gaze.

Li Changning straightened up, swiftly glanced at him in the corner, and then turned to look at Meng Qianshan as if he hadn't seen him.

Meng Qianshan stepped forward and asked, "Doctor Li, how is His Highness?"

Li Changning sighed: “Don’t worry, Gonggong. His Highness is just suffering from a wind chill. Treatment has been dragged on for so long, that’s why he fainted. I will prescribe medicine for His Highness, and after a few days of recuperation, he will be fine.”

Meng Qianshan let out a long sigh and chanted Buddha’s mantras repeatedly.

Then, he asked Li Changning to go to the side to prescribe medicine. The room full of servants, who had assisted Jiang Suizhou, also retired one by one.

Huo Wujiu slowly moved to the bedside, stretched out his hand and touched Jiang Suizhou’s face with the back of his hand.

He was still burning, so hot, and so pitiful.

Huo Wujiu didn’t speak for a while, but the sharp-eyed Meng Qianshan, who was beside him, leaned forward.

“Madam Huo,” he said, “Don’t worry, His Highness is fine.”

Huo Wujiu hummed in response.

Meng Qianshan stared at him for a moment and realized what he was going to do. Madam Huo gave off the feeling that he was going to guard by the bed, but should he stand guard until His Highness woke up?

Although Meng Qianshan was happy for the Prince, he didn’t dare to really let his master do the work.

He said straightaway, “His Highness’ medicine is about to boil over there, so please rest assured, Madam. His Highness ordered me early this morning to ask Doctor Li to examine you once we return. It’s late at night, Madam. Why don’t you go back to your room and wait a minute? This humble servant will stay here.”

Huo Wujiu looked at Jiang Suizhou in silence for a while.

According to his stubbornness where even five cows couldn’t pull him back, he would naturally have ignored Meng Qianshan. However, he had to be obedient now.

All because of the person in front of him.

He made himself sick just for the small injury on his shoulder.

There were many people in the main room with varying intentions. If others were to see his injury, they would be suspicious. If he refused to return to his room, there would be no opportunity for him to bandage it. When this man woke up tomorrow…

He’d definitely be unhappy.

Huo Wujiu’s stubborn spirit, which no one could resist, wordlessly dissipated under this conjecture.

A moment later, just as Meng Qianshan’s heart was in his throat, thinking of persuading him further , he heard Huo Wujiu’s voice.

“Let’s go,” he said.

An imperceptible compromise tinged his tone.

——

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Chapter 115

After that day, Wei Kai finally understood exactly what sentiments his General had for Jingwang.

In the past, he only occasionally heard that there could be such a relationship between men, but he only took them as a joke. It had never ever occurred to him that a man would like another man, much less his General liking Jingwang.

Wei Kai was beyond shocked. However, on their return trip to Lin’an from the hunting grounds, he could not bring himself to be disgusted with Jingwang.

After all, Jingwang treated his General very well. The other day, when Pang Shao was humiliating the general, it was Jingwang who designed to save him in time and conceal the fact that his legs were healed; later, Jingwang suddenly fell ill, and the General happened to follow him back to Lin’an for medical treatment. He himself knew that this was absolutely no coincidence.

Although Jingwang was the younger brother of that dog Emperor, he, Wei Kai, also knew that he should seek ways to repay his kindness.

Secondly…

From his perspective, it was clear that Jingwang wasn’t at all interested in his General! It was the General who was interested, but the other, not so much. Whenever the General, who charmed thousands of girls in Yangguan, looked at the man, he looked as if he couldn’t wait to swallow him into his belly.

In all fairness, Wei Kai thought deep inside that the General was quite inhuman.

Jingwang regarded him as a friend, but what about him! Unsuspectingly, he actually had such… such thoughts toward him!

However, although Wei Kai inwardly castigated him, he still protected the General's shortcomings and felt sorry for him.

Their general had been a bachelor for more than 20 years. Not to mention getting married, it was also his first time even liking someone else. He watched the General ever since they returned to the royal residence, longing for the stars and the moon, sitting pokerfaced in the room and not talking every day, but His Highness Jingwang never spared him a glance.

In the ordinary course of events, he shouldn't spare him a glance.

After all, they had returned to the manor, so of course he and Li Changning would not let the General get hurt. But now, it wasn't whether their General needed to be taken care of, but whether he… could see his sweetheart.

But Jingwang never came. Only the eunuch under Jingwang came once. Seeing that the General was all right, he could only retreat.

Their general finally spoke.

"Is your Prince okay?" The General asked.

The eunuch replied, "Yes, he's fine. Doctor Li is highly skilled in medicine. After a few doses of medicine, His Highness has almost recovered. At present, he is still a little weak, but he can move freely!"

Huo Wujiu stilled for a split second.

"That's fine," he squeezed out word by word.

Wei Kai was so anxious he almost jumped up.

The words “Then why didn’t he come to see me?” was almost written all over the General’s face.

However, the eunuch seemed to be in a rush and did not notice their General’s expression. He smiled and bowed, and then withdrew.

The moment the door closed, a shadow fell on the General’s face, which also made Wei Kai’s heart chill.

He swiftly stepped forward.

But before he could speak, the General, who was sitting still, frowned and rubbed his brows after a long silence.

“Wei Kai,” he called.

Wei Kai quickly responded, “General?”

The General paused for a moment and spoke somewhat hesitantly, “… Help me think about it. How did I make him angry?”

That tone was two points doubtful and three points cautious, which made Wei Kai feel like someone had possessed his General.

He couldn’t bear it any longer.

“… General,” he started, “If you really want to see him, why don’t you take the initiative to visit him?”

——

Jiang Suizhou did have some thoughts of avoiding Huo Wujiu.

He hadn’t forgotten the thoughts he had during his illness that day when he woke up. When he opened his eyes early in the morning, his fever receded, but he stared unblinkingly at his bed canopy. It was just that his head was full of Huo Wujiu.

To his surprise, he was… he was attracted to Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou felt that after bearing the cut sleeve label for a long time, he had fallen into this illusion. However, after considering carefully and at length, he still had no feelings for men, except for Huo Wujiu. Whenever he thought of him, his heartbeat seemed to beat a few times faster.

… I have sinned, ahh!

His mind went blank. He just felt guilty, making him a little flustered. For a time, he didn't know how to face Huo Wujiu and let alone face him. Given his chaotic heartbeat at the mere thought and sight of him, he simply acted like an ostrich, staying behind closed doors, and not seeing him for a few days.

Although avoidance was useless, he could delay so that he didn't have to face the problem directly for the time being.

Soon, May was ushered in.

In recent days, he didn't visit Huo Wujiu, and sure enough, Huo Wujiu didn't come find him.

This had always been the case. Huo Wujiu was indifferent, plus his legs were 'inconvenient', so he always stayed in the room from morning till night. It was him who took the initiative to visit him. Now that he was hiding from him, they really had no chance to see each other.

Jiang Suizhou felt a little sour in his happiness.

After all, the feeling of unrequited love was anything but pleasant.

Hence, in the past few days, Jiang Suizhou was weak and weary due to illness. He didn't have to go to work, so he shut himself in his room and slept. The Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of May could be regarded as a festive day, but now that he was ill, the manor was deserted. The growing festive atmosphere in the city could not float to Jingwang Manor.

Until this day.

After recovering from his illness seventy to eighty percent, he woke up from a nap and sat at the head of the bed to read. The servants in the room were all dismissed. For a time, there was quiet and peace. All he could hear was the rustling of trees in the yard.

Gradually, the sun set.

In that instant, Jiang Suizhou heard the sound of the room door opening. He thought it was Meng Qianshan, so he turned a page in the book without raising his head.

“What is it?” he asked lazily.

Instead, he heard Huo Wujiu’s voice.

“It’s me.”

Jiang Suizhou stiffened from head to toe.

He froze in his place and dared not look up.

For a spell, he had the urge to immediately bury his head under the blanket, so that all his inner thoughts could be hidden from Huo Wujiu.

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Chapter 116

Jiang Suizhou lowered his head. The light in the bedroom was dim, so Huo Wujiu didn’t notice that he was trying to hide from him.

Huo Wujiu closed the door, and only the two of them were left in the room. He propped himself up from his wheelchair with one hand, stood up straight away, and walked towards Jiang Suizhou’s bedside.

“I heard from Meng Qianshan that you’re getting better,” he paused, then remarked casually, “Why haven’t you gone out?”

Jiang Suizhou replied after a half beat, “…I’m too lazy to move.”

Hearing this, Huo Wujiu asked again, “Aren’t you going to go out again today?”

When Jiang Suizhou heard his question, he couldn’t help but raise his head to look at him. He wondered, “What day is today?”

Huo Wujiu looked at him with downcast eyes, “Don’t you know?”

Only then did Jiang Suizhou notice that Huo Wujiu was dressed in an inconspicuous coarse robe today, which looked a bit like Li Changning’s apprentice’s clothes. He was also holding another robe in his hand. It was sky blue and looked rather rough, resembling commoner clothes.

Before Jiang Suizhou could speak, the robe fell on him.

It was cool, with the clean scent of soap.

“Then change,” he said.

“What?” Jiang Suizhou was bewildered.

Huo Wujiu appeared rather helpless. He stared at him for a moment and raised his hand to press on his crown.

“The fifth of May,” he said. “Change, and I’ll tour you out for sightseeing later.”

After saying that, he seemed not to care whether Jiang Suizhou agreed or not. He headed straight outside, with a domineering attitude, waiting for him to change into the robe.

By the time Jiang Suizhou regained his composure, the man had already sat down outside. Across the screen, he could only make out his shadowy figure.

Even in coarse clothes, such a man looked utterly dashing.

What did he just say?

Jiang Suizhou clutched the robe in his hand and was rendered speechless.

The fifth day of the fifth lunar month was the Dragon Boat Festival. He said … Did he just say he would take him out for sightseeing?

Wasn’t that too foolish! The manor was already heavily guarded, and with Huo Wujiu inside, there were many spies and guards from the Hou Zhu. The manor was guarded like an iron barrel, and it was practically a fantasy to go out through the main entrance openly.

Moreover…

Jiang Suizhou looked outside. Outside the screen, Huo Wujiu poured himself a cup of tea and began to drink it.

…It’s unwise to be with Huo Wujiu in my mental state at this moment.

——

Meanwhile, Huo Wujiu outside wasn’t as chill as he appeared to be.

Jiang Suizhou had always taken the initiative to seek him out, so today he really made some preparations. After all, for him, there had never been a precedent where he took the initiative to find someone else. What was more, Jiang Suizhou was someone he had hidden thoughts for that made him feel guilty.

Furthermore, he was quite uncertain about the excuse he cooked up to see Jiang Suizhou.

One must always find an excuse to visit someone for no reason. Huo Wujiu didn’t want to talk to Jiang Suizhou about matters related to Pang Shao and Jiang Shunheng, so he came up with such an excuse, taking him out to play. It was also because he was experienced, having always escaped from the Huo Mansion to play. He just didn’t know whether this noble childe who grew up in the imperial city would bite the bait.

His indifferent and relaxed appearance just now was clearly a paper tiger.

At this moment, he sat fixedly in place. He couldn’t even taste the tea in his hand. Both his eyes stayed on a pair of authentic masterpieces that were hanging on the wall.

A few moments later, the sound of footsteps came from behind the screen.

“Huo Wujiu, where are you taking me?” It was Jiang Suizhou’s voice.

“The Jingwang Manor is heavily guarded, so you can’t go in and out covertly. If there is no important matter, we’d better not take this risk…”

Huo Wujiu raised his head.

However, what he saw was Jiang Suizhou standing awkwardly by the screen. His expression stiffened, exuding resistance and hesitation from head to toe.

But…

The azure robe really suited him. Although he was born with a delicate and bewitching look, his dignified and golden princely fashion always cloaked his pristine temperament. Now that he was dressed in that robe and then tied his long hair up, he resembled a scholar with a commoner background.

Huo Wujiu's heart skipped a beat.

He smiled, stood up and strode to Jiang Suizhou. Before he could hide, he stretched out his hand and captured his wrist.

"Let's go," he said.

Jiang Suizhou scrambled backward in an attempt to hide.

But Huo Wujiu's strength was overpowering, plus he didn't plan to give Jiang Suizhou the slightest chance to dodge. Hence, Huo Wujiu dragged him along and walked straight to the window behind the room.

"Don't worry," Huo Wujiu placated.

"But, if someone finds out that we are not…" Jiang Suizhou still attempted a last ditch struggle.

Then he heard Huo Wujiu speak in a low voice, "It's all right. I told Meng Qianshan when I came in just now that I have something to do with you, so he must not let anyone enter to disturb us."

…Isn't it misleading to put it that way!

However, before Jiang Suizhou could straighten his thoughts, Huo Wujiu's hand already wrapped around his waist. Immediately after, with the man's powerful restraint, Jiang Suizhou was tightly bound to his side. What followed next was Jiang Suizhou feeling nothing underfoot.

A head-on gust of wind blew, and the setting sun enveloped him unstintingly.

Before he knew it, they had already jumped out the window of the room.

In a few breaths, Huo Wujiu’s feet tapped the ground. He took him out of the yard and flew onto the roof of the royal residence.

For the very first time, Jiang Suizhou had a panoramic view of the royal residence.

Jiang Suizhou spotted servants moving to and fro in the manor, as well as the guards patrolling in all directions. But Huo Wujiu’s path was quite tricky, all in the blind spot of their vision. Jiang Suizhou could only feel his robe fluttering, as if clutched by a circling eagle, leaping out of the royal residence.

When he finally stepped firmly on the ground and was released by Huo Wujiu, they already landed in a blind corner of a street near the manor.

It was the corner of a narrow alley. The surrounding area was quiet and empty.

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Chapter 117

He was rather stumped. He looked up at Huo Wujiu, and met his smile.

It was a very light smile, but with a sparkle that was too difficult to ignore. He embodied a bird that had flown out of its cage, or a wild beast that took him to his territory.

With sprinkles of good-natured badassery, he sized him up.

“You…”

Jiang Suizhou was about to speak, when he heard Huo Wujiu say, “Do you still not want to go out?”

As he spoke, he pulled Jiang Suizhou and walked candidly towards the outside of the alley.

“Since you have recovered, stop shutting yourself indoors,” he advised as he walked.

Jiang Suizhou muttered behind him, “If you’re this capable, why don’t you just go back to Northern Liang?”

Huo Wujiu glanced back.

“Do you want to leave?” He added, “If you want to, we can leave the city right now.”

Jiang Suizhou was startled and looked up at him.

Huo Wujiu, who was half a step ahead of him, turned around, looking serious and not joking at all.

Jiang Suizhou’s mind went blank for a moment.

“But…”

In the next moment, Huo Wujiu laughed.

“I’m teasing you.” His voice unconsciously softened some. That genial smile blended with the gentle breeze of the early summer evening.

It drifted into Jiang Suizhou’s ear.

——

This was the second time Jiang Suizhou roamed the market in Lin’an.

Last time, it was because of Ji You’s matter that he entered the place and got drunk. However, he wasn’t part of the residents there. Even though he seemed to blend in with the crowd, he was quite distinct from the others.

So after that day, Jiang Suizhou never thought of ‘going outside to sightsee’ again.

But this time … seemed to be different.

It might be because today was particularly lively.

The Dragon Boat Festival was considered a major festival in Lin’an. Due to the festival, there was no curfew in the city. At this juncture, the streets was bustling with activity with surging streams of people. The street hadn’t been lit yet, but the street vendors had set up their stalls clamorously. The stalls selling lamps and trinkets were colorful, and the stalls selling food had smoke billowing up from them.

In the distance, they could see the lion dance team marching through the street. There were street performers at the entrance of the street and cries of approval would echo from time to time.

And because of the crowds, Huo Wujiu kept holding Jiang Suizhou’s wrist.

Across his robe, his strength and temperature were palpable.

Somehow, Jiang Suizhou was also infected by the excitement around, and the corners of his lips curled up.

“It’s really lively,” he said, “I can’t feel it at all in the mansion.”

With the busting excitement around, no one noticed them. The moment his words fell, his words melted into the chatters of the people around him.

However, Huo Wujiu heard it.

He chuckled under his breath. He lowered his head and said to Jiang Suizhou, “I told you it was time to come out and look around. Did I lie to you?”

Jiang Suizhou also laughed.

Although reason told him that he should stay away from Huo Wujiu, Jiang Suizhou had to admit that it was a great pleasure for him to walk side by side with Huo Wujiu at the moment.

“Alright, let’s go and have dinner first,” Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou was not familiar with the place, so he let Huo Wujiu pull him to a small restaurant. They sat by the window on the second floor.

The restaurant wasn’t too big, the tables and chairs were quite crude. The cups on the table were coarse porcelain, and the poured tea was also common green tea bits. Nevertheless, the view was nice. They only had to look down to see the bustling streets beneath then.

Although Jiang Suizhou remained unperturbed, his eyes kept wandering about. After Huo Wujiu ordered some dishes and let the waiter withdraw, Jiang Suizhou asked, “How did you find this place?”

He watched as Huo Wujiu poured tea for him naturally while answering, “Wei Kai recommended it. After they entered the city, they stayed here and said that the northern food here is authentic and close to Yangguan’s.”

In the mountains that day, Huo Wujiu had already told Jiang Suizhou. The soldiers under his command were not completely wiped out, and there were still some survivors left. Headed by Wei Kai, they were now scattered in Lin'an City.

Jiang Suizhou was nodding when Huo Wujiu added another line and looked up at him.

"There is no chance yet, so I can only stay here and show you the dishes here," he said with a faint smile, "In the future, I will definitely take you back to Yangguan once and have a look there."

Jiang Suizhou's heart beat wildly uncontrollably.

He could feel how nostalgic and fond Huo Wujiu was of Yangguan. There was even a twinkle in his eyes.

But Jiang Suizhou had a profound realistic illusion, as if Huo Wujiu was not just saying that he wanted to return to Yangguan, but firmly that he wanted to take Jiang Suizhou with him and integrate himself into his past and future.

Jiang Suizhou was rendered speechless for a while and just stared at him blankly.

Huo Wujiu was also stunned on the spot, then he smiled and said, "What? Are you not used to eating northern food? If you are not used to the dishes, let's move to another place."

Only then did Jiang Suizhou snap back to his senses.

What a gaffe, what a gaffe.

He instantly pinched his palm, cursing himself for being such a good-for-nothing.

He hastily masked his feelings and changed the topic.

“No.” He cleared his throat and said, “This Prince… I just remember that there is no wallet on this outfit. I have no money on me. Do you have any?”

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Chapter 118

Huo Wujiu paused, and then as if he just realized this matter, expressionlessly spoke: “… I forgot.”

His expression was especially serious and didn’t seem to be faking at all.

Jiang Suizhou was just trying to find a topic, so he was brought up short by his response.

…It can’t be!

He looked at Huo Wujiu steadily. Huo Wujiu looked at him calmly, blinked, but his face betrayed some innocence.

He really brought no money!

Jiang Suizhou had never come across such a dilemma in life, and so he immediately panicked. He promptly fumbled for something on him, but when he changed his clothes into the robe, he had taken off all the jade accessories on him. Right at this moment, there was only a clean set of clothes covering him, something made out of the most coarse material.

Jiang Suizhou’s brain couldn’t function for a moment.

They’ve already ordered just now. If they couldn’t take out something to pay, did that mean they had to return to the manor to fetch some? They had snuck out, so of course they couldn’t charge it to his account…

While he was freaking out, a chuckle across from him reached his ears.

It was deep, but feathery, with a touch of undisguised delight.

The next moment a heavy coin bag was gently tossed on the table, landing in front of him with a clang.

Jiang Suizhou looked up and found Huo Wujiu opposite, looking at him nonchalantly. In front of him was a coin bag with ordinary patterns, full of silver.

“Why do you believe everything?” Huo Wu Jiu asked with a raise of his eyebrows. He rested his face on one hand and idly looked at him with a smile.

Only then did Jiang Suizhou realize that Huo Wujiu was teasing him.

This man is really… When he first arrived at the Jingwang Manor, Huo Wujiu didn’t utter a word to anyone. When Huo Wujiu occasionally spared him a glance, his eyes were nothing but ruthless and frosty. But now, the wolf’s tail was gradually exposed, exhibiting a bit of his widely known villainy.

Jiang Suizhou pursed his lips and muttered in embarrassment, “… Who can tell if you’re for real or not? What’s more, where did you get the money?”

Huo Wujiu was not the least bit troubled.

“It’s Wei Kai’s,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned: “What?”

Huo Wujiu picked up the coarse porcelain cup in front of him and took a sip of tea. His mighty golden-like appearance, coupled with that natural indifference, made him the epitome of a rebel chieftain, occupying a mountain.

“This is what he has saved these days, plus the reward money from the royal family,” he explained, “He rarely goes out. It’s useless to keep them, so he gave them to me.”

Jiang Suizhou was rendered speechless.

… Who would have thought that General Huo, who is famous in history for being indomitable, would go out for a meal and rob his subordinate's money?

——

Although Jiang Suizhou was feeling guilty deep down for Wei Kai, he still finished the meal with Huo Wujiu.

Seriously speaking, this restaurant was said to have moved to Lin'an when Southern Jing moved south,but their handful of northwestern dishes were quite flavorful. Even if Jiang Suizhou had little appetite, he ate more because of the taste. By the time they finished their meal, it was completely dark outside.

The downtown streets were lit up with lanterns. It was impressively bright, projecting a festive atmosphere.

Jiang Suizhou stuffed the silver coin bag back to Huo Wujiu and let him foot the bill. Afterward, they left the restaurant and merged into the crowded street.

Jiang Suizhou was naturally curious about everything.

He had also dabbled in the folk customs of the Jing Dynasty, but what was described in books was entirely different from what he saw with his own eyes.

It was inconvenient for them to take things back on their return, but it didn't hinder him from window shopping. He looked around as he walked, his eyes shining.

Huo Wujiu wasn't interested in any of the displays. Even if the place was different from Yangguan, both were more or less alike. He had long been tired of seeing them.

However, Jiang Suizhou beside him was interesting in his eyes.

The young master of the imperial family, who grew up in the imperial capital, looked arrogant and noble, but in fact had never been exposed to various aspects of society. Those common and popular playthings seemed so interesting in his eyes, like a child, who was curious about everything. Those clean eyes were rather soulful.

With people rambling to and fro, nobody paid them any attention. No one noticed that his eyes kept falling on Jiang Suizhou at his side, silent yet steadfast, with a depth that he himself didn’t notice.

Along with the stream of people, the two gradually strolled to the street entrance.

There were a lot of people gathered around the open space in the middle. In the open space stood several bare-chested wandering artists, performing there.

One of the men was holding a torch in his hand. Whatever was in his mouth, when he blew on the torch, he literally spewed out fire, arousing a burst of exclamations and applause around him.

Jiang Suizhou also stopped in his tracks.

Wandering performers like them had always been an uncanny mystery in his eyes. There were few records about them in history books, which made them even more legendary. He stopped and didn’t move any further, watching those performers finish breathing fire and swallowing their swords on the spot.

Several young apprentices around them, who were wearing opera-like facial makeups, somersaulted fervently. Cheers rose one after another, and Jiang Suizhou was gradually stimulated by the atmosphere, with almost a smile of awe on his face.

Huo Wujiu stood by his side. He looked at him sideways, and the corners of his lips unconsciously rose.

Everyone was afraid of Jingwang, and the world knew that he was crafty and glib to the bone. Only he, Huo Wujiu, saw how attractive Jingwang was beneath his guise of keeping people at arm’s length.

No one had ever discovered this treasure, but he picked him up.

At that exact moment, the group finished performing another show. Several children who beat the gongs flipped them over, smiled and began to ask for a reward from the spectators around.

Coins jingled as they rained down.

The crowd dispersed, escorting the two of them to the front row.

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Chapter 119

Jiang Suizhou was watching the children enthusiastically picking up the coins, when all of a sudden, a slender, sinewy hand with rough fingers touched his hand and stuffed something cold into his palm.

When he looked down, he saw a piece of silver.

He looked up and found that Huo Wujiu was gazing down at him. Noticing his puzzlement, he said, “Toss it over.”

So it was to let him toss a reward.

Jiang Suizhou was really fascinated with the performance earlier, but because he had no money in his hand, he couldn’t give any reward, so he immediately dismissed the idea. Now that he had a silver stuffed in his hand, his fingers itched right away.

He smiled at Huo Wujiu, then raised his hand. The next moment, the glittering silver fell at a child’s feet.

The child who picked up the coin was pleasantly surprised. He stepped forward without delay to pick up the silver and bowed toward Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou’s attention was locked on the joyful kid and didn’t notice that when he smiled at Huo Wujiu moments ago, Huo Wujiu’s Adam’s apple rolled quietly.

Then, a chilly sensation struck his hand once more.

He glanced at Huo Wujiu in astonishment and found that he was still looking at him. He raised his chin in the direction of those wandering

performers, motioning him to continue.

Jiang Suizhou paused for a mere second and cast the silver in his hand again.

Immediately after, another silver was stuffed into his hand.

One after another, glimmers of silver clattered around on the ground. When the few acrobats realized that there was a rich and generous lord in the crowd, they were pumped up. Delighted and grateful eyes fell on Jiang Suizhou, making him a little embarrassed.

This time, when Huo Wujiu stuffed another silver to him, he pushed it back.

“Enough is enough,” he whispered.

But the piece of silver was forcefully shoved into his hand.

“It’s okay, there’s more,” Huo Wujiu replied.

Jiang Suizhou felt a little hesitant: “But…”

Although he was also happy to see the few wandering performers smiling at him, it was a bit too flamboyant.

“Did you have fun watching just now?” Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“Then continue,” Huo Wujiu instructed.

Jiang Suizhou looked at him, and then shot a glance at the ecstatic wandering performers. The clothes they were wearing were quite rough and shabby, and they looked very thin. The facial paint on the kids was stained with sweat, but they clutched their silvers as they jumped non-stop.

The silver in Jiang Suizhou flew anew.

Huo Wujiu looked down at Jiang Suizhou, and immediately fished out another piece and put it in his hand.

Silver or not, they were nothing in his eyes.

All that filled his vision now was his beloved. All he felt was that Jiang Suizhou's smile was beautiful.

——

It took a while for Jiang Suizhou to leave the spot.

He insisted Huo Wujiu show the coin bag to him, so Huo Wujiu openly raised the half-empty purse in front of his eyes and jiggled it.

"I told you. There's still a lot," Huo Wujiu remarked, totally unconcerned.

Jiang Suizhou could not help but grit his teeth and whispered, "But, we were too extravagant! What if someone noticed us? What are we going to do?"

Huo Wujiu asserted, "They won't."

Jiang Suizhou did not understand: "Why not?"

Huo Wujiu pointed to the south with his chin and said, "At this hour, all the bigwigs in Lin'an are watching the scenery on West Lake."

Speaking of this, his lips hooked. He inched closer to Jiang Suizhou and said, "Flower lanterns, row boats, and dragon boat races; and later there will also be people on the lake to release sky lanterns. Want to see?"

Jiang Suizhou didn't know where Huo Wujiu had heard about so many activities, but he knew that the lake in Lin'an was connected to Taihu Lake. There was a magnificent observation tower by the lake, so it was expected that many nobilities would be there for today's festival.

Jiang Suizhou didn't dare to wander in front of their eyes.

He instinctively stepped back, but Huo Wujiu captured his wrist.

“Let’s go if you want.” With a wicked smile, he glanced at Jiang Suizhou and forcibly pulled him along.

Jiang Suizhou expressly denied, “I don’t want to! There are many people there at this time. Many of them will most probably recognize us. We’d better not take this risk…”

But Huo Wujiu seemed to be a risk-taker.

“It’s all right,” he said. “With me, I won’t let them see us.”

Jiang Suizhou was still uneasy.

However, he couldn’t resist Huo Wujiu. He was all too powerful, and his martial arts were beyond the reach of ordinary people. Of course, no one could stop him from what he wanted to do.

Jiang Suizhou let him drag him straight along half the street until Taihu Lake was right before him.

From a distance, he could see the sparkling water on the lake, reflecting the spectacular bright lanterns that illuminated the place as bright as day. There were exquisite and chic gaily-painted pleasure-boats and dragon boats at the lake, accompanied by faint drum beats.

On the bank of the lake, a magnificent five storey pavilion stood there, with glazed roof tiles reflecting bright lights. It was the famous and awe-inspiring Mingfeng Tower in Lin’an.

Presently, the tower was ablaze with lights, and shadows of perfumed clothes and gorgeous hairdos could be vaguely seen.

Jiang Suizhou tensed up from head to toe.

However, Huo Wujiu continued forward and headed straight over there.

They would reach the place soon.

Jiang Suizhou quickly pulled him back: “Wait a minute!”

Huo Wujiu turned around: “What’s wrong?”

He was about to tell Jiang Suizhou not to worry, when Jiang Suizhou dragged him to the side. On the side was a stall selling colorful knick-knacks, all of which were to ward off evil spirits during the Dragon Boat Festival.

Jiang Suizhou fished out a piece of silver from Huo Wujiu’s coin bag. Next, he took something that was hanging from the stall and attached it to Huo Wujiu’s face.

“It’s okay now.” Jiang Suizhou breathed a sigh of relief.

Under the lanterns, a hideous-looking fierce beast mask securely hid Huo Wujiu’s face.

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Chapter 120

Huo Wujiu couldn’t resist a deep chuckle.

In terms of him getting caught, someone would recognize him by his body shape, even if his face was covered by a mask. Since he had snuck out with Jiang Suizhou, Huo Wujiu had no intention of letting anyone in the court recognize him.

But…

He raised his hand and touched the mask on his face. It was still quite helpful.

In any case, it was something Jiang Suizhou had fastened for him.

After releasing a muffled laughter behind the mask, he dragged Jiang Suizhou away.

“Don’t worry, just go,” Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou responded and hurriedly followed.

However, there was no chance for him and Huo Wujiu to be recognized.

When they reached the end of the street, Huo Wujiu dragged him into a deep alley again, and then brought him up on the roof, flying towards Mingfeng Tower.

By this hour, the streets and the lake were bright. They glided into the dark night sky, like birds sneaking in the night, without attracting anyone’s attention.

Jiang Suizhou thought he was going to take him to the lake, and never imagined it would be like this again. Huo Wujiu kept leaping and took him directly to the roof of Mingfeng Tower.

For a while, Jiang Suizhou felt dizzy.

Before him was a panoramic night view of Taihu Lake. The starry lanterns on the lake were akin to twinkling stars in the night sky, reflecting the dragon boats and gaily-painted pleasure-boats floating on the lake.

Further away was the brightly lit Lin'an City.

And below his feet was the Mingfeng Tower, where the VIPs gathered. The higher the number of floors, the higher the price of the banquet halls in the tower. It was a no brainer. For such a festive event, 80% of the people in the halls underneath had to be from Pang Shao's family.

Just then, a muted voice broke through the roof.

"… I'd like to offer a toast to Pang-*daren*!"

… So it turns out to be Pang Shao, feasting with his fellow party officials.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned in place, but heard Huo Wujiu's snicker beside him.

"What a coincidence," he said lightly.

"You…" Huo Wujiu's behavior startled Jiang Suizhou. While his heart was almost pounding out of his chest, Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and looked at Huo Wujiu in awe.

Just how bold is this man?

Nobody in Pang Shao's party probably ever imagined that Huo Wujiu's legs were not only healed, but that he also dared to fly on the roof of the pavilion where they were feasting to appreciate the dragon boat during the Dragon Boat Festival.

Huo Wujiu smiled at him nonchalantly. He also pulled him up, and they sat on the ridge of the glazed roof.

The roof of Mingfeng Tower was particularly wide, and the four corners were decorated with huge lanterns that were as tall as a grown man, reflecting the glazed tiles. The two happened to sit on a dark side of the roof, with the brilliant lights of Lin'an under their feet.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but approach Huo Wujiu and said in a whisper, "You are too daring!"

Huo Wujiu took off the mask with one hand and fiddled with it: "Does this count as daring?"

He uttered these words heedlessly. At a glance, it was obvious that this awe-inspiring, righteous general in the history of history was also a troublemaker when he was young.

Jiang Suizhou gradually regained his senses, stared at Huo Wujiu, and then turned his attention to the city lights behind him that stretched to the sky.

He was accustomed to following the rules, but never knew that this frightening, risky move, in addition to the excitement … was actually also very interesting.

He listened to the rounds of toasts beneath his feet, and occasionally heard one or two officials loudly flattering Pang Shao. They only thought they were in the midst of the festive season, in the most luxurious place in Lin'an City, sitting in the hall with the best view, and entertaining the most powerful minister in the dynasty. Unbeknownst to them, the terrifying God of War of Northern Liang was on the roof above their heads, sitting on the ridge.

And that God of War, right at this moment, was leisurely flexing his legs. His eyebrows were stretched, and he was lying under the stars in the sky, above the city lights.

It was really rather marvelous.

Jiang Suizhou paused and could not help but laugh softly out loud.

When Huo Wujiu heard Jiang Suizhou's laughter, he immediately turned his head sideways to look at him.

"Isn't it nice?" He continued, "I didn't lie to you."

Jiang Suizhou asked with a smile, "Have you always made trouble like this in Yangguan?"

Huo Wujiu raised his eyebrows and seemed a little unconvinced: "How can this be considered making trouble?"

Then, without waiting for Jiang Suizhou to respond, he leaned over in Jiang Suizhou's direction and bumped him gently with his shoulder.

"It's because you're terrible at finding fun for yourself that you think climbing a roof is scary," he said.

Jiang Suizhou unconsciously nodded in agreement.

He was indeed clueless. He grew up quiet and always obedient, and even if he looked for fun, it was limited to finding some books to read by himself, unlike Huo Wujiu, who climbed high and low.

Although Huo Wujiu was now in Lin'an, he still bore such courage despite the Hou Zhu and Pang Shao weighing down on him. He most probably turned Lin'an City upside down when he was in Yangguan, causing the late Marquis endless headache.

He couldn't resist laughing at that thought. It was just funny.

Meanwhile, when Huo Wujiu, who was beside him, heard no denial from him. Huo Wujiu pursed his lips and smiled. Jiang Suizhou was obedient and quiet, making him feel a little distressed for him.

He blurted out without thinking, "There will be a lot of fun in the future. Just wait."

The tone of that oath sounded a bit childish, like callow youth patting his chest and promising to protect his secret love.

It gave off a fiery and safe feeling, making Jiang Suizhou's heart go pitter-patter.

He looked at Huo Wujiu and moved his lips. Just when his tongue was tied, he heard loud and passionate drum rolls on the lake in the distance.

He looked up and discovered that the dragon boat race had already begun.

There were lanterns all around the lake and the shore was ablaze, illuminating the dragon boats. All at once, the crowd gathered around the lake and cheered enthusiastically.

Even the people in the hall below them gathered around the terrace.

Jiang Suizhou shut his mouth nervously.

Huo Wujiu could see his worry. In reality, there was nothing to worry about. The Mingfeng Tower was magnificent, especially the roof, which was much higher than the two-floor buildings stacked nearby. In the dark, all they could see were the shadows of the figures on the terrace. What was more, even if those on the terrace looked up, they wouldn't be able to see anything.

However, Huo Wujiu did not say a word to pacify him. Instead, a smile of interest bloomed on his face.

In fact, Jiang Suizhou was totally interesting in his eyes. He could always evoke some of Huo Wujiu's wicked disposition.

He didn't watch the dragon boat, only Jiang Suizhou until the end of the dragon boat race.

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Chapter 121

The man was so nervous, but he was really more interesting to watch than the race. Although he looked keyed up, his eyes always hovered around the people downstairs and the dragon boats. He was truly captivating.

It was not until the race was over and the crowd on the terrace had returned to the banquet hall that Jiang Suizhou was finally relieved.

Taking advantage of the cheers of the people around the lake, he leaned into Huo Wujiu's ear and asked in a low voice, "Which boat did you just bet on?"

Huo Wujiu didn't even make a sound.

Jiang Suizhou noticed that he was looking down, and assumed that he was wholeheartedly watching the movement of Pang Shao's people below them, and did not spare time to watch the dragon boat race.

Jiang Suizhou then described to Huo Wujiu: "The fourth one had good momentum at first, but I didn't expect them to lose strength in the second half of the race and let the third one on the side overtake them. In the end, they only won second place. The third one has always been steady. I think they must have been well trained, and everyone on board has a tacit understanding… "

Just then, Huo Wujiu raised his hand: "Shhh."

Jiang Suizhou immediately stopped talking and followed Huo Wujiu's gaze downward.

Then he saw that the people in Pang's party who had returned to the banquet hall walked back to the terrace again.

This time, Pang Shao's figure was actually among the crowd.

Jiang Suizhou was terrified. He promptly sat up and even breathed lightly, as he watched the people downstairs.

It escaped his notice how Huo Wujiu secretly breathed a sigh of relief next to him.

He raised his hand and scratched his ear next to Jiang Suizhou's side with his index finger.

... *This Jingwang is really.*…When he spoke so close to him, only a few words registered in his ears, but his speaking rendered half of Huo Wujiu's body numb. It struck straight along his spine to his lumbar spine, making something somewhere under him ready to start wriggling.

Fortunately, Pang Shao appeared, momentarily scaring away the little fox who was oblivious to everything.

——

Pang Shao was pushed by the officials from their party to come out and release the lanterns.

Pang Shao believed nothing of these, but this bunch took the opportunity to curry favor with him. He didn't refuse either and even walked out of the hall with everyone smilingly.

The dragon boat race had ended now, so the people around the lake then released the lanterns one after another. The light yellow glow reflected in the white lanterns, slowly lifted off and floated all over the sky. It was really breathtaking.

Pang Shao stood atop the spacious terrace and also received a sky lantern handed over by a servant.

"I don't have any wishes." He smiled lightly. "My only wish is the prosperity of the country and for the people to be at peace, as well as the health of His Majesty."

The officials nearby clasped their hands and followed suit.

Pang Shao wrote down the wish with his own hands, lit the lantern and released it in the sky.

Immediately after, another official came forward with the printed lamp.

“Chief Minister is concerned about the country and the people. This humble official really admires you!” The official said, releasing his own lantern up. “This humble official then wishes that all of Chief Minister’s wishes come true, good fortune and longevity!”

Hearing this, Pang Shao smiled with satisfaction and watched as the official released the lantern full of flattering prints into the sky.

The two lanterns floated and swayed, rose into the air, and merged into the sky of lights.

After watching for a while, everyone hugged Pang Shao and went back inside, drinking amidst roars of laughter.

Jiang Suizhou on the roof was relieved, feeling cold sweats dripping down his back.

He looked sideways at Huo Wujiu, but found him with his head up, looking at the sky full of lights. Jiang Suizhou also followed his gaze, and realized that thousands of sky lanterns were swaying in the night sky, which was really beautiful.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but let go of his nervousness and watch the sky.

“It’s really pretty,” he commented.

But then Huo Wujiu spoke beside him.

“It’s a pity. I was careless just now and forgot to bring you a lantern,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help laughing, and rejoined, “Fortunately, you didn’t bring it. How could there be a lantern floating from the roof? Had you kept a lantern here, someone would have discovered us, don’t you think?”

Still, Huo Wujiu shook his head.

“Then I have to make a wish for you,” he said

Before Jiang Suizhou could speak, he changed his tone and said, “One is not enough. Let’s make two.”

Jiang Suizhou was amused and laughed.

He was about to ask Huo Wujiu where he got the two wishes from when he heard a crunch that petrified him.

He hurriedly followed the sound and saw that Huo Wujiu broke off half of the glazed tile from the roof of Mingfeng Tower with his bare hands.

He then held the half piece of glazed tile in his hand, and with the force of both hands, he broke it into two pieces again.

“Look up,” Huo Wujiu prompted.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t understand. He raised his head and heard a subtle but sharp whizz in the air, heading straight into the sky.

A sky lantern that was slowly floating fell in response. The light inside instantly burned the lantern, and then it was extinguished into a handful of ashes that fluttered down.

“This is Jiang Shunheng’s may the country be prosperous and the people at peace!”

Jiang Suizhou heard Huo Wujiu’s voice.

The next moment came another sharp whizz.

Another sky lantern went out and fell down.

“This is Pang Shao’s longevity wish.”

Two bright sky lanterns that instantly blended into the night crashed down soundlessly amidst the rising lanterns in the sky.

It was the same two lanterns that Pang Shao and his lackey released on the terrace.

Jiang Suizhou turned his head sideways in a daze. Huo Wujiu was resting both his hands on his knees, tilting his head and giving him a reckless smile.

Jiang Suizhou’s heartbeat seemingly stopped.

How could this be making a wish for him?

This was clearly God looking down from a commanding height. He had found something from thousands of wishes of all sentient beings and told him in front of his eyes, *I will give you everything you want.*

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Chapter 122

By the time Huo Wujiu brought Jiang Suizhou back, it was already late at night.

He still entered through the back window and sent Jiang Suizhou back to his room. After Jiang Suizhou had changed his clothes, Huo Wujiu openly went out from Jiang Suizhou's room again.

Meng Qianshan, who was guarding at the door, discovered that Madam Huo was looking radiant in his wheelchair. For a moment, he was about to speak but bit his tongue instead.

Huo Wujiu, on the other hand, didn't even spare him a glance. With something resting on his lap, he rocked his wheelchair and drifted away.

Meng Qianshan couldn't help but stare at Madam Huo's back.

The General was different from ordinary people. His legs were obviously crippled, but despite sitting on a wheelchair, he gave off the feeling that he could walk as if on wings.

Meng Qianshan stared for a while, shook his head, and went into the room to serve his master.

In Huo Wujiu's room, Wei Kai was like an ant on a hot pot, anxiously spinning.

Others might not know what those two had done, but he was in the know. Because of this knowledge, he knew how dangerous it was for their General to go out, which was no less than wandering under the eyes of the ruler of Southern Jing.

Hence, the later it was, the more flustered Wei Kai became.

Fortunately, the door opened on the second night watch, and the sound of a wheelchair sounded from the door.

Wei Kai felt like he had walked through the gates of hell. How stimulating.

“General, how are you?” When the door was closed, he asked this right away.

Huo Wujiu raised his hand and tossed a light coin bag into his hand.

The purse was more than half empty, and only a few pieces of silver were left at the bottom of the coin bag. When he poured them out into his palm, they jingled down emptily.

Wei Kai hid all the heartache in his eyes.

Forget it, forget it… Although the money here was his hard-earned savings when he was wandering about destitute in Southern Jing, his General had never been short of money since childhood, let alone the spare money at hand. Spend it all, spend it all…

However, he couldn’t help asking, “Did you buy something?”

After he asked, he raised his head and looked toward Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu got up from the wheelchair and sat down beside him. He was playing with a big object in his hand, like a mask.

His master held it under the lamp, his eyes downcast as he examined it. The light brightened the smile in his eyes, and the corners of his mouth, which had always been downward, curled up on one side. The smile was so faint that it could hardly be seen, but when it surfaced on Huo Wujiu’s face, the smile looked particularly dazzling.

“Yeah, I did,” Huo Wujiu replied casually. After speaking, he raised the object in his hand and showed it to Wei Kai.

“Jingwang gave it to me. Does it look nice?”

Wei Kai swallowed his saliva, unable to find his voice for a spell.

…Humph, not one bit!

So a fortune was exchanged for this? Whatever the cost, the rough-crafted mask depicted a fierce beast with a bloody mouth. The fierce beast, named Tao Wu, was a legendary evil beast in the Book of Supernatural Beings. It was a slow-witted, arrogant and cruel monster that always thrashed wildly through heavenly paths. It was used by the people to ward off evil spirits, much like fighting poison with poison.

How could their General be pleased with such a thing!

Wei Kai stared at the mask and could not say anything for a while, which made Huo Wujiu dissatisfied.

He frowned and questioned unceremoniously, “Are you deaf?”

Wei Kai met the General’s gaze, which hinted at an unkind spark, and temporarily resigned himself to his fate.

Forget it. Although he never went to school, he still knew when to point to a deer and call it a horse. Now that the tyrant was in front, even if this young lord was infected by that stupid and fierce beast and turned into a mallet, he had to agree with him.

“… It’s beautiful.” His words were against his will, but he reluctantly agreed under the coercion of the mighty.

——

Fortunately, Wei Kai didn’t suffer a big loss.

After that day, he received monetary rewards from Jingwang’s room under various grounds. The amount was more than several times greater than what he had lost to Huo Wujiu.

Although Wei Kai was also a man who would never bend over for five buckets of rice, he still clutched the money that Jingwang returned and looked at the General, who was putting away the cheap mask as if it were a precious item. He could not help but feel that Jingwang was more human than the General.

After that day also, Jiang Suizhou ended his sick leave.

He had long recovered, but he lingered in the residence for two more days, until the day of the Grand Court Assembly. He knew he could not relax at this juncture even if he wanted to loaf on his job. After all, at the hunting ground on that day, he really gave Pang Shao a devastating blow.

Sure enough, the atmosphere in the courtroom was quite strained today.

The Hou Zhu had never been a person who could hide his thoughts. Today, he showed his indifference to and rejection of Pang Shao for all to see. Presently, most of the people in the courtroom were Pang Shao's henchmen. Pang Shao was frustrated, so these people were shaking in their boots. All throughout the morning, the courtroom took on a particular atmosphere because of this.

However, from the looks on the Hou Zhu's face, Jiang Suizhou also figured that he was merely angry at Pang Shao.

He had read historical records carefully over and over and knew that the Hou Zhu and Emperor Jingling were in a hostile relationship. Emperor Jingling favored the original owner's biological mother, while the mother of the Hou Zhu, the current Empress Dowager Pang, was the long neglected consort of Emperor Jingling. It was written in history books that the Hou Zhu barely saw the Emperor when he was young. He didn't even recognize who his father was until he was around five years old.

Afterward, to coax him, Pang Shao got incomparably close to him and spoiled him.

Hence, even if neither of them was aware of it, Jiang Suizhou was well aware that Pang Shao had filled the vacancy of a father for the Hou Zhu.

For this reason, even after such a huge turmoil, in the Hou Zhu’s heart, he still couldn’t renounce Pang Shao.

Even if he wanted to punish him, he would never kill him for that day.

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Chapter 123

Since Jiang Suizhou had long been mentally prepared, he participated in the court session today just to catch up on recent events. As for the Hou Zhu and Pang Shao, he would just watch the play.

True enough, he didn’t come for nothing.

An official in the court reported that General Lou had returned in triumph and that he would arrive in Lin’an in a few days. At that time, someone must manage the ceremonial guard of honor to welcome the General.

Everyone knew that this wasn’t a promising errand.

General Lou Yue had a stinky and tough temper, and was notoriously immune to both soft and hard tactics. Whoever would get his hands on this job would not only find it unpleasant, but also would most likely invite trouble to himself.

The courtiers all knew this truth, and so did the Emperor. He looked around disinterest and finally found himself the first thing to be happy about today.

He raised his hand.

“Fifth Brother, the task of welcoming General Lou is entrusted to you,” he decreed.

——

There were some things that bystanders could see much more clearly than the authorities.

After the court session today, Pang Shao's face couldn't be painted the moment he boarded his carriage.

In front of all the courtiers today, His Majesty humiliated him time and again. The courtiers were neither deaf nor blind, so of course, they witnessed everything. He wasn't made of wood. Naturally, he also felt it.

When he spoke, the kid on the throne turned a deaf ear to him. When he suggested something, the kid did the opposite and sang a different tune.

This feeling of humiliation was entirely unfamiliar. Since the death of the late emperor, he had yet to experience this again.

Pang Shao's face remained gloomy, and he didn't utter a word until he returned to his manor.

He admitted that since the end of the year, the fleeting months hadn't been that smooth. There was no question that Jingwang, a sickly seedling who would kick the bucket at any time, had made him fall into trouble one after another. The errands he attained also weren't fruitful, and even the newly built ancestral temple in the palace collapsed.

These were facts, he admitted to them. Although he was infuriated, he knew these were only a few bumps in the road. He was still sitting as the Chief Minister, so he couldn't be considered the loser.

Nevertheless…

He sat down in his hall and slowly sipped his tea.

All things considered, although he addressed the Emperor His Majesty for the time being, in his eyes, he was merely an ignorant youth, a man in his thirties who had not fully grown up. He brought Jiang Shunheng in his current position all because he was related to him by blood, and because his eldest sister raised him into a stupid and clumsy fool. He was too easy to control.

He kept sending sugar-coated cannonballs to make that child, who had been a brat since childhood, trust and love him, just so that on the day he sat on the throne, he himself would hold the power of the world.

But now it seems like…

Pang Shao set down the teacup and looked down at the ripples in the cup with an icy smile.

Now, it seemed like the person he raised, like a dog or a cat, became unfamiliar. Once you treat him well, it will become a reason for him to reach out for a yard after taking an inch. If the treatment was a bit unsatisfactory, he would forget all your kindness in the past.

He could only blame himself too for being too eager for quick success and instant benefits and spoiling that kid.

He made Jiang Shunheng feel how obedient he was to him, letting him really fee that he was the Emperor, to the point where he dared to step on his head.

As everyone knew, he, Pang Shao, never cared who was sitting on the throne. He only cared whether the man was easy to control, and whether the power of the Great Jing was in his hands. As for the so-called Emperor, if he was able to protect and raise one yesterday, he, too, could replace the disobedient one with someone younger and better controlled tomorrow.

It was just too troublesome.

After a long time, Pang Shao sneered.

“Someone,” he called.

His confidants hurried forward, knelt down in front of him, and quietly waited for his orders.

Pang Shao spoke unhurriedly.

“Is His Majesty’s eldest son nearly three years old now?” he asked.

The henchman nodded along with a cupped fist.

Pang Shao smiled.

“As I recall, his birth mother was not of high status, but a palace maid,” he said. “Go and report to the Empress Dowager, get that child raised under her care. Tell her to just foster him, and don’t say anything else. Don’t ask too many questions either.”

——

Because the task of welcoming Lou Yue fell on Jiang Suizhou’s head, he had no choice but to be busy in the following days. Rite matters were complicated, and with the officials under Pang Shao always trying to rip him up, the difficulty of his work became much harder than before.

However, he knew that this was just the norm. There were just these minor troubles just because Pang Shao had not yet found a reason to take him down in one fell swoop. Therefore, he was quite cautious and secretly observed Pang Shao’s movements.

Pang Shao, however, was surprisingly quiet these days. Even when it was finally the day Lou Yue returned to the city, he still made no moves.

Today, the sky was clear and the air was fresh. Even the sky was without a cloud. Jiang Suizhou set off early in the morning. He followed the honor guards out of the city, and waited outside the south city gate of Lin’an to welcome Lou Yue’s army.

It was also this morning that a willow was brought into Jingwang Manor and delivered to Huo Wujiu.

“General, what does this mean?”

Wei Kai held the willow in his hand.

It was after spring, and the willows in summer were thick and tough. The person who folded the willow was also quite strong, and he even broke a whole sturdy willow, making it look like a whip for urging a horse.

Huo Wujiu’s eyes paused on the willow branch. He remembered the note he handed Ji Hongcheng that day. A fleeting look of disgust appeared on his face, and then he turned his gaze away.

“Has Jingwang left early?” he asked.

Wei Kai nodded in response.

Huo Wujiu spoke unhurriedly.

“That means Lou Yue is back.”

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Chapter 124

The sun rose higher.

Jiang Suizhou knew that the march was slow, so he sat in the carriage and waited. Fortunately, Lin’an was near the water, and there were plenty of trees outside the city. Hence, even if the sun was shining, it would not be too hot.

It wasn’t until near noon that a soldier rode a fast horse from afar to report that General Lou was about to arrive.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly got off the carriage and stood in the middle of the road.

Since Lou Yue withdrew troops back to the capital, the army had to stop outside the southern city gate, so the whole southern city gate was under martial law. At this minute, the guards of honor solemnly guarded the place, while the officials of the Ministry of Rites headed by Jiang Suizhou stood in rows. From a distance, an atmosphere of solemnity and reverence prevailed.

In a short while, the indistinct sound of horses’ hooves broke the silence. Jiang Suizhou looked as far as the eye could see and spotted a large army approaching from a great distance.

The leader was a general on a towering horse. He looked very tall and his shoulder and back muscles were as thick as a mountain. He was wearing silver armor, and the scarlet cloak behind him fluttered up. At a glance, he knew that that was General Lou Yue.

Jiang Suizhou was a little nervous, and a thin layer of sweat seeped out of his palms.

Lou Yue must have seen the original owner, but Jiang Suizhou only saw the man's name in history books. It was the first time he would see him in person.

Although he had gotten used to Jingwang's identity now, to the point where nobody could spot the difference, it still didn't rule out this General's discerning eye. He was somewhat refined in his rough way. Also, the original owner and Lou Yue might have had some dealings Jiang Suizhou knew nothing about, and this could expose him in front of Lou Yue.

Jiang Suizhou took a deep breath and silently waited until Lou Yue arrived a few feet in front of him.

Once Lou Yue reined his horse and stopped, Jiang Suizhou smiled and bowed towards him: "General Lou, this Prince welcomes and congratulates your triumphant return. You've promoted the prestige of our great kingdom!"!

Lou Yue laughed uproariously. He dismounted his horse, clasped his fists together and bowed to Jiang Suizhou.

"This General thanks Your Highness!"

Seeing this situation, Jiang Suizhou surmised that they did not have much of an intersection before. They weren't at all that close. Even judging from his attitude, he was probably too focused on the battlefield and still didn't know about Huo Wujiu's marriage to him as his concubine a few months ago.

Jiang Suizhou was more or less relieved, and the smile on his face unconsciously turned more sincere. He stepped forward and held Lou Yue's arm.

At this distance, he sized Lou Yue up at railway speed.

Tall and strong; he actually had some resemblance to the portrait in history books. He was in his forties at this time, in his prime. Although the wrinkles

on his face were deeper due to the wind, frost, rain and snow, he did not look old. On the contrary, they enhanced his fortitude.

“General, no need to be polite.” Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze and smiled. “You must be travel-worn. you’ve worked hard, General.”

Seeing his temperate expression and his speech that carried none of that double-edged sword typical of other officials, Lou Yue laughed and exchanged pleasantries with him. “It’s not hard work! I’m used to being on horseback. On our journey back to the capital, we didn’t rush, so I’m entirely relaxed.”

Jiang Suizhou then went along with him and exchanged a few pleasantries, commending him moderately.

“This Prince is here today to welcome you into the city.” After exchanging pleasantries, Jiang Suizhou said, “His Majesty has already set up a banquet in the palace and is waiting to reward you, General. Once you’ve organized the army here, we can enter the city.”

Lou Yue nodded repeatedly and asked, “I’m just wondering. Has His Majesty mentioned what will happen to the soldiers under me later on? With legions of soldiers and horses, stopping outside the city is not an option.”

Jiang Suizhou paused.

Based on his knowledge from historical records, after returning to the capital this time, Lou Yue was stripped of his military power step by step. All the military forces in his hands fell into Pang’s party after they had gone through the Ministry of War.

When the Hou Zhu ordered him to bring his soldiers back to the capital to receive rewards, he had long made such a plan.

Jiang Suizhou stayed silent for a moment and said ambiguously, “His Majesty said that the Ministry of War should sort and count first before rewarding them according to their merits.”

He currently had no evidence at all. Naturally, he could not prove it by relying on the memory of his previous life. What was more, if he were to immediately make friends with Lou Yue the moment they met, it would only arouse his suspicions.

With this consideration, he smiled and nodded to Lou Yue, then looked behind him.

The army was marching slowly, and it was only the impatient Lou Yue who came ahead of the rest.

Presently, the army was marching mightily to the border of Lin'an City. Lou Yue's subordinates numbered 50,000. Although it was not an uncountable number, at this moment, they still exuded an imposing sense of grandeur.

Just then, a white horse galloped lightly in their direction.

The person on the horse did not travel in the ranks, and only raised dust in the wake of the horse, like a reckless knight-errant. But that person was clearly wearing armor. The closer he got, the more vaguely visible his frame. The person's frame was slender and graceful, like that of a woman.

… *Woman?*

Jiang Suizhou's fingers curled, and his eyebrows could not help but wrinkle.

If speaking of women in this army… there would be no one else.

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Chapter 125

Right in time, Jiang Suizhou heard Lou Yue’s laughter beside him.

“I’ve made Your Highness laugh. That is this General’s youngest daughter. Her name’s Wajun, ” he introduced.

Jiang Suizhou sighed softly deep inside.

Sure enough, it’s her.

But somehow, instead of relaxing, he felt his chest tightening with an inexplicable stuffiness and discomfort that made his breathing a little disordered.

Perhaps it was because… When he heard that name, he immediately remembered that Huo Wujiu always appeared along with her in the history books.

For Huo Wujiu, Jiang Suizhou was living proof that Huo Wujiu had humiliated him. He was a stain in his life that could never be ignored. But Lou Wanjun… She and he were a rare romantic and soul-stirring divine couple in the historical records.

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes couldn’t help but fall on Lou Wanjun.

To be fair, the lady was most assuredly beautiful. She must have taken after her mother. Unlike Lou Yue, who was big and tall, she had pretty and heroic eyebrows and eyes, with the peculiar unique exquisiteness of a woman.

She wasn’t raised in the boudoir, so her skin wasn’t fair. It was a light wheat color tanned under the sun. This in turn made her beauty show a healthy spirit and a sprinkle of tenacity.

Her demeanor, in particular, exuded a kind of wanton and recklessness of someone raised on the battlefield. This kind of temperament bore quite a resemblance to Huo Wujiu's. He believed that if the two were to stand in one place, they would certainly be extremely eye-catching.

Jiang Suizhou struggled to avert his eyes.

… *What's wrong with me?*

From the start, his current thoughts were merely pipe dreams, and he knew it. Huo Wujiu had his own life track and would meet the people he should meet. He, on the other hand, was just an ordinary person who somehow transmigrated from the future and sought to cling to him in troubled times.

Yet now, the person Huo Wujiu should meet had arrived, but he was not at all happy.

Jiang Suizhou knew he shouldn't think so, but he couldn't suppress his discomfort.

He had never experienced this kind of discomfort before. He felt extremely tormented, but he didn't know who he was competing with. He was just reluctant to retreat.

A few moments later, he smiled gently and reluctantly said, "Sure enough, a tiger father will never beget a dog son. General Lou's daughter is also a rare heroine."

Lou Yue was oblivious and didn't notice anything amiss with him. He waved his hand and replied, "What heroine? It's all because my wife passed away early, so she grew up wild in the military camp. She's now around eighteen, but others can't even tell! My return to the capital this time is also for this. I must detain this girl in Lin'an properly so she can learn some female skills like embroidery, chess, calligraphy and painting. That way, she'll at least look like a girl."

He accompanied his speech with laughter, then added, "I also ask Your Highness to please take care of her. If there are any unmarried noble

gentlemen or young talents in the capital, I am not too picky…”

Jiang Suizhou replied with a forced smile.

He wanted to tell Lou Yue not to worry because her fate was here; that there was no need to match her with someone else. But when he opened his mouth, he could not make a sound. Meanwhile, Meng Qianshan, who was next to him, noticed his anomaly and hurriedly stepped forward to support him.

“Your Highness?”

Jiang Suizhou bowed his head and smiled, allowing Meng Qianshan to support him. He then pushed the boat along with the current, “This Prince is in poor health. I’ve embarrassed myself, General.”

Lou Yue waved his hands again and again: “It’s alright, it’s alright! It will take a while to organize the soldiers. If Your Highness isn’t feeling well, you can go and rest!”

Jiang Suizhou nodded with a faint smile, and Meng Qianshan helped him leave.

While he admitted he was being delusional, his heart also collapsed. He couldn’t even manage to face Miss Lou.

He truly embodied the heart of a dove occupying a magpie’s nest.

On the other side, a steed neighing resounded. The woman in armor removed her foot from the stirrup and dismounted. She clapped her hands and handed the reins to the guard next to her.

She then walked towards Lou Yue, then wondered, “Huh? Father, why did that gentleman leave just now?”

As she spoke, she also shot a few glances in the direction of Jiang Suizhou’s carriage.

“He’s good looking, but why did he look unhappy? Is he your enemy in court, Father?”

Lou Yue gritted his teeth, raised his hand and poked a finger on her forehead.

“What are you talking about! He’s just feeling unwell and went back to rest!” After speaking, he did not forget to warn her, “Don’t you hit on him, hmm? He’s a cut sleeve.”

Lou Wanjun laughed and replied, “What are you thinking? He’s just handsome. Am I not allowed to praise him?”

“Who are you trying to compliment! You don’t look like a girl!” Lou Yue was exasperated at her failure to meet his expectations. “You’d better watch your words! The capital is not like the barracks where you can spout whatever you want to say! If you speak so indiscreetly, how are you going to…”

“Find a husband!” Lou Wanjun interrupted him and provided what he was going to say next. “I know, I know. My ears are getting calluses.”

Lou Yue glared at her in a fury: “Don’t take your father’s words as a joke!”

Lou Wanjun scoffed. She raised her hand and patted his shoulder casually, retorting perfunctorily.

“Got it, got it. I’m not taking it as a joke.” She smiled breezily, not taking him seriously at all. Even the last of her words fluttered buoyantly upwards, like a wild goose feather streaking across the desert sky.

“Alright, make haste. Don’t let that little lordling wait for a long time.”

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Chapter 126

As the official who went out of the city to welcome Lou Yue, Jiang Suizhou had to accompany him all the way back to the palace. After meeting the Emperor together, he'd have to attend the reception banquet held in the palace together with Lou Yue.

By the time Lou Yue finished settling his army, it was already getting late. All the officials in their carriages, together with the Lou father and daughter who rode into the city, and several generals of the army, passed through the opened southern city gate and headed toward the palace with great strength and vigor.

Although Jiang Suizhou wasn't a high official, he was the sole living brother of His Majesty and the only Prince of the dynasty. Therefore, when he went out of the city to meet Lou Yue, he gave Lou Yue great respect. The officials couldn't guess the emperor's current thoughts, so they treated Lou Yue cautiously.

However, the Emperor naturally did not have as many concerns as them. He just wanted to let the person he loathed to welcome the person he hated. It was best to let the two of them fight. The more deadlocked they were, the better.

As a result, while the court officials were cautiously speculating on the intention of the Hou Zhu, the latter only complimented Lou Yue with little interest before letting the father and daughter get seated at the table.

Nonetheless, during the dinner this evening, there were several scenes that the Hou Zhu disliked.

Lou Yue has always been wildly arrogant and unreasonable. In the past, even Pang Shao wouldn't receive half of his respect. But today, knowing that His Highness Jingwang, who was in poor health, welcomed him outside the city under the scorching sun, his attitude towards him wasn't as caustic as he treated those civil officials. Lou Yue gave it another thought, and halfway through the banquet, he even got up and offered a toast to Jiang Suizhou.

Apart from His Majesty, Lou Yue had never taken the initiative to toast anyone.

For a time, everyone stared speechless at each other, and their eyes on Jiang Suizhou changed. On the throne, the Emperor's face also turned gloomy.

Everyone was well aware that Lou Yue had a massive army under his control. It was because he was not well-liked in the court and was excluded from everyone that the Hou Zhu was able to use him with confidence.

But now…

Jiang Suizhou also felt the sudden freezing of the surrounding atmosphere. He raised his eyes to look at Lou Yue, and saw his unperturbed countenance. At a glance, he realized that it was because of their meeting today that Lou Yue got up and raised a toast to him.

However, everyone around them only cared about the sudden close relationship between him and Lou Yue. They would not dig deep into what had actually happened outside the city today.

Jiang Suizhou only felt that this was a sticky situation.

Seeing that Lou Yue was approaching with his wine, Jiang Suizhou got up ahead of him and spoke with a gentle smile before Lou Yue, "How can this Prince trouble General Lou to propose a toast to me? This Prince gives you a toast. This Prince's body is really good for nothing. I even lost my courtesy outside the city today. Please don't blame me, General… "

Before he could end his speech, he ran out of breath. He coughed with a cup in one hand, choking on the wine and spilling some of it.

Lou Yue was scared at this sight. He had been in the army all year round, and all he saw were powerful menfolk who could carry weights. He had never seen such a pale, sickly man. He immediately spoke, ” “What is there to blame for? Your Highness is unwell. You should rest more.”

Jiang Suizhou struggled to stop his cough, smiled and clinked glasses with him.

He let out a sigh of relief. Now, he clarified some doubts in everyone’s mind.

But at this moment, a voice drawled from above.

“General Lou should give His Highness Jingwang a proper toast.” Pang Shao interjected.

Lou Yue was puzzled when he heard this remark. He turned to Pang Shao, who had a smile on his face as he unhurriedly supplemented.

“General Lou, you probably still don’t know that there is a happy event in Jingwang Manor.”

Hearing these words, Jiang Suizhou’s heart thumped, and he choked on the wine he was drinking halfway through. In an instant, the fake cough turned into a real one.

He naturally knew what kind of happy event Pang Shao referred to as a ‘happy event’.

When all was said and done, General Lou was unaware that the only son of his former best friend was married to Jingwang Manor as a concubine.

Jiang Suizhou was coughing so badly that Meng Qianshan hurried forward to smoothen his breath. However, Jiang Suizhou couldn’t care less about this. His heart was already in his throat.

Once Lou Yue hears of the news, he would certainly be furious, and there was no knowing what he would do. But regardless, his anger would most definitely be directed at him.

He barely stopped coughing, took a deep breath, and just waited to face the storm.

Lou Yue, on the other hand, was puzzled: “What happy event?”

Pang Shao glanced at Jiang Suizhou, and then at Lou Yue, chuckled ambiguously a couple of times, and remained silent.

As for the Hou Zhu, for a rare moment, his cloudy face turned sunny. He discarded his doubts and displeasure and gave Pang Shao a satisfied glance.

Thereafter, an official of Pang’s party smiled and answered, “General Lou does not know, right? The only son of the Marquis of Dingbei, General Huo Wujiu, has become a much told tale with His Highness Jingwang!”

For a spell, bursts of laughter arose from the seats.

Another official laughed and chimed in, “What General Huo? He should be called Madam Huo now!”

Lou Yue was deeply shocked. He stood frozen for a long time before he regained his senses.

What kind of person was this Jingwang? He was a man known to all the people in the world as a cut sleeve. He had heard about Huo Wujiu’s defeat at the start of the year in Lingnan. He just never imagined that…

He was humiliated to this extent!

He looked at Jiang Suizhou with disbelief.

He discovered that Jingwang, who had the looks of a woman and too frail to stand a gust of wind, was ashen-faced. He was clinging weakly to the hand of the eunuch beside him as he looked straight at him. Because of that

wracking cough just now, his eyes were moist with tears. Under the lamplight, his sickly figure evoked pity.

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Chapter 127

Lou Yue burned with anger.

He had also exchanged a few words with this Jingwang today, and from the way he spoke, he, more or less, grasped a bit of this person's character. From the looks on Pang Shao's face at this moment, it was clear as day who came up with such a vicious way to humiliate Huo Wujiu.

Lou Yue glared stormily at Jiang Suizhou, making him shiver.

The next moment, however, Lou Yue turned around. With a more than eight feet-like stature, he stood there like a mountain, looking straight to Pang Shao.

"Wily old Pang Shao, I've always thought you inhuman, but didn't expect that you're actually this vicious! Do you even want to bring feuds in the court battlefield into the harem?"

His voice was thunderous. Like a clanging huge bell, it reverberated in the throne room, startling all civil and military officials of the court.

Even Pang Shao was rendered speechless for a while.

He opened his mouth and was about to speak, then he heard Lou Yue speak again.

"You must be feeling proud, right?" he raved, "It's only glorious when you win a battle, and it's called honorable to fight back in Ye City! You should have either killed him or released him, but to marry a prisoner of war to the Prince? What? Are you waiting for the world to praise you for being smart and call Huo Wujiu a fool!"

“You’re the fool for doing such a thing! Not only will the world laugh at you and the emperor, but also at the whole scene! Not only did you and His Majesty become laughingstocks but also the entire Great Jing! Don’t you civil officials like to be recorded in history? In another thousand or two thousand years, believe it or not, people will still be laughing at you for torturing prisoners of war with such nasty methods, laughing at your absurdity, shamelessness and deviousness!”

——

Huo Wujiu had long tossed that thick willow branch out of the window.

After nightfall, Wei Kai hurriedly entered Huo Wujiu’s room: “Something happened, General.”

When Huo Wujiu gave Wei Kai a sideway glance, he took out a tiny note, rolled into a small scroll, from his sleeve. A flying pigeon delivered it.

“This is a reply from Li Sheng, the defending general on the north bank of the Great River,” Wei Kai reported.

Huo Wujiu hummed in response, took the letter and unfolded it in his hand.

The paper was tiny with minuscule handwritten characters. Although it contained a lot, it was rather legible. But perhaps the person who wrote the letter was too excited; although it was in teeny characters, the strokes bore traces of an uncontrollable trembling, making the writing look a bit scrawly.

In particular, a few tear drops had fallen on the paper and smudged the handwriting.

Huo Wujiu quickly browsed through the letter in his hand.

The words were brimming with sincerity and excitement beyond palpable. Li Sheng said he never thought that Wei Kai would see the General one day again. Although the General’s legs hadn’t healed, there was definitely a ray of hope. He had been guarding the north of the Great River and dared not forget the General’s instructions and teachings for a day. He promised to

take care of the borders of the north of the General for him. If the General had any orders, just tell him. By then, the General only needed to give a command, and Li Sheng would obey the dispatch and wait for him to return home.

Huo Wujiu read the letter twice before slowly putting it down.

He didn’t say anything.

Seeing that he had finished reading, Wei Kai said: “General, although Li Sheng has never worked with us before, it turns out that he is such a person of character! This is good. As long as we have a chance to leave Lin’an and get to the bank of the river, I think we have nothing to worry about. Shoot them down by all means!”

Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes and wiped his fingers over the tear marks on the paper.

There was no expression on his face, let alone a trace of his emotion at this time. After a few moments, he snickered, “Yes, I have only seen him twice.”

How could someone who had never spoken to him and wasn’t one of his men be so emotional that he could hardly express himself in words? What was more…

Who knew whether the tears on the stationery were true feelings or merely a pretense for him to see?

A few moments later, Huo Wujiu’s fingers moved and with a clatter, he crumpled the letter in the palm of his hand.

“…General?” Wei Kai looked at him in confusion.

Huo Wujiu unfurled his hand indifferently, and let the snow-white scraps fall to the ground.

“Don’t answer the letter yet. Wait a little longer,” he instructed.

“But…”

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes, then he saw Wei Kai’s face full of surprise, looking at him incredulously.

He knew what Wei Kai was thinking. He was now free to go in and out of the Jingwang Manor as if it were no man’s land, so it couldn’t be easier for him to quickly escape from Lin’an with his men and flee back to Northern Liang.

Moreover, they had made contact with the guard of the northern part of the Great River. They also got that person’s guarantee, so leaving at this time was the easiest and most foolproof action.

However, the reason for Huo Wujiu’s defeat at the beginning of the year was still not clear, and 80% of it was some hidden agenda that he was unaware of. As far as his current speculation was concerned… even his royal brother’s people couldn’t be trusted.

Thus, Li Sheng wasn’t entirely trustworthy either.

However, it was still not suitable to tell Wei Kai these endless speculations. He had a straightforward temper and could hardly retain his composure. His mindset was also simple. Letting him know would inevitably lead to further trouble.

With this in mind, Huo Wujiu raised his eyes at Wei Kai and hooked one corner of his lips.

“No buts,” he said, “I just like to pick a more stimulating method. So, don’t rush to respond. Let Li Sheng wait a little longer.”

Wei Kai showed an unspeakable expression.

After a moment of silence, he sighed.

“This subordinate knows what the General is thinking.” His expression was deep, and his brows were filled with sorrow and exasperation.

Huo Wujiu frowned: “What do you mean?”

He heard Wei Kai’s sorrowful sigh: “You’re not leaving just because you want to win His Highness Jingwang and can’t be bothered with anything else, right? This subordinate understands. I’m at your disposal, General!”

Wei Kai’s face bore an unflinching expression in the face of death. It was akin to a loyal general under a tyrant. Despite knowing that his master would wreck the country and bring ruin to the people, he gritted his teeth and assisted the evildoer out of loyalty.

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Chapter 128

Huo Wujiu looked at Wei Kai. He massaged his temples, moved his mouth, but still didn't speak.

Wei Kai felt that the General's jaw seemed to tighten a little, as if he was clenching his teeth. This appearance was proof that the General was unhappy, but Wei Kai couldn't figure out why.

The General's intentions had always been difficult to guess, so Wei Kai felt at a loss.

After hesitating for a moment, he tentatively opened his mouth and asked, "…General?"

Huo Wujiu glanced at him indifferently.

"This subordinate understands!" Wei Kai immediately stood at attention.

Wasn't the look in the General's eyes telling him not to speak out of turn? He understood that although the General had such sentiments, it was not glorious and certainly could not be declared openly.

He understood perfectly. He understood perfectly.

With this conclusion, Wei Kai smiled warmly at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu gave him a fleeting glance and didn't bother to dig deeper into what messy thoughts Wei Kai "understood". He raised his eyes and looked out of the window. The night sky had already turned dark, but Jiang Suizhou still hadn't come back yet.

“Now that you understand, go take a look.” Huo Wujiu instructed, “When Jingwang returns home, I have something to discuss with him.”

Wei Kai nodded repeatedly and retreated.

——

Meanwhile, a crossfire was raging in the palace banquet hall.

Scholars taught by Confucius and Mencius culture knew euphemism more or less. No matter when, they would leave some respect to each other and express their meaning politely. Therefore, the ministers in the court also had their own way of getting along with each other. Even if they gave tit for tat, they would not really trample on each other’s face.

But Lou Yue was different. He was a person who had never read books, and the reasoning of those literate people did not make sense to him.

The moment his tirade fell, the palace hall turned utterly quiet. All the courtiers held their breath and dared not speak any more. He was staring at Pang Shao alone, and Pang Shao sat there with a rare ugly look on his face.

He kept silent for a moment and reluctantly spoke icily, “I’m afraid General Lou has had too much to drink. Someone, help General Lou go back to rest.”

This was his way of saving his own honor and expressing a warning to Lou Yue.

But Lou Yue turned a deaf ear to him.

He laughed coldly and said aloud, “I am not drunk. I am very sober. Wily old thief Pang, if I had drunk too much today, I am afraid your head would have already fallen under the table.”

Pang Shao’s face became even darker.

In the dazzling hall, the courtiers dressed in fancy clothes looked at each other and sneaked glances at him. Pang Shao was accustomed to living like

a prince and had long been unable to stand suffering like this. He pressed his hand on the table and resisted the urge to leave the table.

Lou Yue… Lou Yue! He had long made up his mind to deal with this man. After today, he must let the reckless man know that if someone provoked him, he would hack that person to death and make his life worse than death.

He gritted his teeth and didn't speak for a moment.

Just then, a voice broke through from the side.

"Since today is the day to celebrate the General's merit, if you have any disagreement, you might as well speak in private. General, please return to your seat for now. Don't be discourteous in front of His Majesty."

Lou Yue turned his head and discovered that it was Qi Min.

He remembered this old man. Although he was long-winded and annoying on normal days, he always opposed Pang Shao and minded his own business.

What was wrong with this old man? He had only been gone for a year, and now he was wearing the same pants as Pang Shao?

Once he realized that Qi Min stepped forward to speak for Pang Shao, Lou Yue showed no mercy. He glanced at him and questioned, "Discourteous? Since you are the Minister of Ceremonies, this matter is indeed under your control. Then let me ask you. Is it proper for a royal prince to marry a prisoner of war?"

Qi Min frowned, looked at him, sat back down after a moment, and said nothing more.

Lou Yue glared at Pang Shao, then tossed the cup in his hand. He walked toward the Emperor on the throne, knelt down, and saluted: "This General knows of his presumptuousness today, but please carefully think about it, Your Majesty. If you do something detrimental to the prestige of the

heavenly family because you are compelled by treacherous people, it will not damage the face of the duplicitous, but Your Majesty's supremacy. "

The Hou Zhu's face was equally ugly.

Lou Yue was frivolous, but he had this capital to be frivolous.

Even if he was muddleheaded to such an extent, the Hou Zhu also knew that he currently had no other general like him in court. Even if he was dissatisfied with Lou Yue, he did not dare to execute him.

Lou Yue was the only formidable city wall for the Great Jing of today.

He moved his lips and agreed reluctantly, "Got it."

Lou Yue frankly got up and went back to his seat.

The meal made both the host and the guests unhappy, and when the time came, the banquet was hastily dispersed.

Qi Min got onto the carriage and the carriage was about to leave when his best friend rushed to stop him, squeezing into the carriage.

"What's the matter?"

Qi Min was old and had drunk some wine. He was feeling tipsy, and was leaning against the carriage to rest.

His good friend sat down in front of him and asked inexplicably, "Why did Minister Qi say that today?"

Qi Min opened his eyes to look at him and said, "Because Lou Yue has really overstepped his bounds today and displeased His Majesty."

This wasn't what Qi Min should say. His good friend replied anxiously, "Minister Qi, don't tease me!"

Qi Min retorted, "I'm not joking."

He sat up straight and slowly said, “As you’ve seen, General Lou has spoken frankly. Today, he has not only offended Pang Shao, but also displeased His Majesty. Military generals are always more or less frivolous. This is common. But General Lou’s gullibility stemmed not from his meritorious deeds, but from his genuine annoyance toward Pang Shao and concern for Great Jing.”

His good friend seconded, “That’s for sure!”

Qi Min sighed.

“That being the case, Pang Shao will not tolerate him.”

His good friend said, “… Is this your conjecture? But now, if there is no Lou Yue, Great Jing will no longer have a good general.”

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Chapter 129

Qi Min lowered his eyes.

“You and I will worry about this, but Pang Shao won’t.” He said, “When I left the table, I deliberately walked near Pang Shao, and I witnessed someone who approached to comfort him. When he frankly said to the man, ‘Let him be arrogant. He will face great difficulties in the future’, I knew that I guessed right.”

His good friend exclaimed anxiously, “That can’t be good!”

Qi Min pondered for a while, then spoke leisurely.

“We can’t really let him get away with it.” He said, “That’s why I said that today, in order to start a dispute with General Lou and draw a clear line with him. In this way, Pang Shao won’t shy away too much, and perhaps even test my intentions, so as to use me. Although I am old and decrepit, I also have some acquaintances in court more or less. By then, we can always find clues. Whatever he wants to do, there will always be traces we can follow and ways to break them.”

The friend pondered for a moment, nodded in approval and said, “Your method is promising.”

After speaking, he sighed and said, “I have always known that you’re honest and straightforward, but now it seems that you’re also astute.”

Qi Min smiled at his remarks and shook his head.

“I’m not astute,” he contradicted. “It was only recently that His Highness Jingwang secretly saved me. It was then I suddenly realized that in a fight with Pang Shao, I should learn that defense is sometimes the best offense.”

On the other end, indistinct bursts of scolding sounded in Lou Yue's carriage.

Lou Wanjun sat aside and laughed straight at him.

"What are you happy about!" Lou Yue was disgruntled.

Lou Wanjun answered with a smile, "Nothing. It's just that Father didn't mince words today. It was quite pleasant to see."

"It's no use to scold him!" Lou Yue said angrily, "The absurd deed has already been done. It's just a pity…"

Speaking of this, he suddenly did not know whether it was a pity that the good imperial court was ruined in this manner, or a pity that the child, Huo Wujiu, had suffered this ordeal.

"What a pity for Brother Huo?" Lou Wanjun prompted.

Lou Yue turned somber and no longer spoke.

He knew he was sorry for the Marquis of Dingbei, but the righteous cause of his family and country was here. As a general, he shouldn't be swayed just because of his brother's private affairs. But—But…

His brother died on the battlefield, and he didn't even know where he was buried. He only had such a son, but now he was looking on as that child was tortured and maimed, begging for death, and humiliated as a concubine.

Lou Yue felt distressed.

However, Lou Wanjun laughed softly beside him, reached out and patted him on the shoulder. She comforted him, "Father, don't be too sad. It's already happened. At least, that Jingwang doesn't seem to be a scoundrel. He won't really do anything to Brother Huo."

Lou Yue glared at her, "How do you know he's a good person from a single encounter? Just because he is good-looking?"

“Of course not. If you think he’s a wretch, why didn’t you scold him today?” Speaking of this, Lou Wanjun couldn’t help but add, “However, it’s true that he is quite good-looking.”

Lou Yue raised his voice, “Even so, that child shouldn’t have been married off to him!”

Lou Wanjun persuaded him, “This is something you definitely shouldn’t worry about, Father. As long as he’s alive, it is a trivial matter to suffer some humiliation. What’s more, you’re just averse to it. How do you know that Brother Huo was unwilling?”

“Nonsense!”

“It’s not nonsense. Who made Jingwang look this amazing? Brother Huo isn’t blind.”

——

The night was already deep by the time Jiang Suizhou returned home. The only thing he felt was exhaustion.

This was because he had been busy all day. With such a big storm at the evening banquet, he felt practically drained of energy.

Lou Yue was indeed a loyal minister and an outstanding general. He was an excellent person, but Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but worry.

In history books, Lou Yue was stripped of his military power and beheaded. He didn’t die on the battlefield, but in the hands of his own monarch and fellow officials, which showed that Pang Shao wanted to get rid of him long ago.

What was more, Lou Yue was too straightforward and unafraid of making enemies for himself.

Jiang Suizhou was inevitably uneasy, fearing that Pang Shao would kill him. If Lou Yue also wouldn’t end well, Jiang Suizhou would never be at peace with himself.

He felt a raging headache. Along with the wine he drank, Jiang Suizhou was more or less drunk at this point. He returned to Anyin Hall on his palanquin. He just wanted to have a good rest and then make plans tomorrow.

However, just as he reached the courtyard entrance, he saw a slender, tall figure standing there, waiting anxiously.

When Jiang Suizhou looked closer, he discovered that it was Wei Kai.

“Why are you here?” When he got off the palanquin, Wei Kai greeted him.

Wei Kai stepped forward and smiled, “Your Highness, it is our General… our Madam who has something to discuss with you, so please go there.”

Jiang Suizhou hummed in response and followed him towards Huo Wujiu’s room.

He took a deep breath.

He knew that Huo Wujiu sought him out for something at this time, and that it must be about Lou Yue. If Huo Wujiu… really took him as a friend, chances are there might also be something about Lou Wanjun.

Jiang Suizhou told himself, *It’s alright; this is all rightfully so.* The only thing that shouldn’t be was his improper thoughts, which he must overcome by himself.

When he entered the door, he saw Huo Wujiu sitting in front of the hall and drinking tea. When Huo Wujiu saw him enter, he looked in his direction.

Those black eyes were very deep.

Somehow, the fatigue that Jiang Suizhou had accumulated all day struck him without warning, making the tip of his nose a little sore.

He didn’t know where this exhaustion mixed with grievances came from, but he felt that this emotion was surging so much that he found himself a bit overwhelmed.

Perhaps he was too drunk, so he was somewhat sensitive and overthinking.

After he sat down on the chair in front of Huo Wujiu, Huo Wujiu raised his hand and waved Wei Kai away.

“Have you been drinking?”

Huo Wujiu spoke once the door of the room closed.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

He imagined a lot of things on the way, but he never considered that the first sentence Huo Wujiu would ask would be this.

He opened his lips, and when he spoke again, his tone had already weakened.

“… A little bit,” he said.

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Chapter 130

Huo Wujiu looked at him in silence for a moment, and slowly exhaled.

“I’m not trying to discipline you,” he said. He stood up, tested the temperature of the teapot on the table, poured a cup of tea, and handed it to Jiang Suizhou.

“I heard today that Lou Yue has returned.” Huo Wujiu inquired.

Jiang Suizhou moved his hand as if to take the teacup from the table. However, when he heard Lou Yue’s name, he retracted his hand.

He was feeling rather complicated.

He knew all too well that Lou Yue was a rare loyal minister and an outstanding general of Southern Jing. Even if the palace of Southern Jing were to collapse, he didn’t want him to follow the old path in history and be killed by Pang Shao again.

He wanted to save Lou Yue.

However, when Huo Wujiu asked, he somehow felt a little uncomfortable and suffocated.

He replied, “Yes, I went out of town today to escort him.”

After a pause, he somehow added, “His daughter Lou Wanjun is with him.”

After saying that, he raised his eyes to look at Huo Wujiu.

Unbeknownst to him, his eyes at this time were rather apprehensive and looked a little pitiful.

Huo Wujiu noticed it.

Those eyes glowed with moisture under the lamp. Huo Wujiu stiffened, feeling a soft bump on his heart.

The corners of his mouth also curled up.

He thought Jiang Suizhou must now be drunk and not at all sober to show such an appearance and slow speech. He locked eyes with Jiang Suizhou's and said rather casually, "Huh? That Lou Yue has really made some effort to bundle her back from the frontier."

He was smiling and his tone was also quite relaxed, but in Jiang Suizhou's eyes, it looked like something else.

Jiang Suizhou had only mentioned Lou Wanjun's name, but Huo Wujiu smiled.

Jiang Suizhou told himself in the bottom of his heart, *This is the way it should be. The two were childhood sweethearts. It's a no brainer. It's only right.*

Meanwhile, Huo Wujiu didn't forget to add, "She has a bad temper and likes to fight with others. She is more unreasonable than her father. She didn't bully you today, did she?"

Listening to his familiar and relaxed tone, Jiang Suizhou felt a sour feeling in his nose.

It's my fault. He thought to himself. How did he somehow fall in love with Huo Wujiu?

He didn't want to listen to Huo Wujiu anymore. He just wanted to go back to sleep and wake up sober.

He coughed a couple of times and dodged Huo Wujiu's question. He changed the subject and said, "You sought me out today, just for Lou Yue, right?"

Hearing his question, Huo Wujiu also stopped the chit-chat and sat down beside Jiang Suizhou.

“Yes,” he said. “I made some plans today and want to discuss them with you.”

But when someone was drunk and was exposed to the wind again, his brain was more or less disoriented.

Jiang Suizhou nodded on the surface, but deep inside he thought: When speaking about Lou Wanjun, Huo Wujiu smiled and said she was bad-tempered, but when it came to him, he only talked about these business matters.

That sour feeling rose once more and Jiang Suizhou could no longer hold it down.

Huo Wujiu was completely oblivious to it and replied, “He returned this time and brought with him 50,000 soldiers and horses, which is quite massive. However, even if I were to make use of them, it will be difficult to accomplish anything in a very short period. When the time comes, Pang Shao will also gather his forces, and we’ll be at a standstill with them. This is somewhat difficult to deal with.”

Jiang Suizhou hummed in response.

Huo Wujiu continued, “However, this is our only way out. Now that the 50,000 are stationed outside the city, they probably won’t be withdrawn in the short term. If we can convince Lou Yue to turn his allegiance within this period, we can try to quickly surround Lin’an, revolt and directly kill Pang Shao and Jiang Shunheng inside the city, and save the people from suffering through a war.”

He spoke earnestly. His brows furrowed unconsciously, and he also drew dotted sketches on the table. Jiang Suizhou nodded from time to time, looking like he was listening seriously.

But when Huo Wujiu raised his eyes, he realized that he was distracted.

There was a faint fragrance of wine in the room. It was extremely mild. Jiang Suizhou didn’t really drink too much, but his eyes were unfocused.

This was the first time Huo Wujiu saw him like this.

He knew that Jingwang was charming, and although he always exuded a part of him that others couldn’t distinguish, all he saw was his cuteness. However, Jiang Suizhou had never been careless when talking about business. He was acting abnormally today… Something bigger than the business at hand must have happened.

Huo Wujiu’s expression turned cold, and he scowled.

“Did something happen today?” He asked out of the blue.

Jiang Suizhou nodded repeatedly in front of him. There was doubt that he didn’t listen to what he was asking.

Huo Wujiu closed his mouth and didn’t say a word.

A few moments later, Jiang Suizhou snapped back to his senses and hurriedly looked up at him: “Hmm?”

He found that Huo Wujiu’s expression had turned solemn. He was scowling, heralding a rising storm in the mountain. He looked angry. “What happened?”

Jiang Suizhou was a little timid when he saw his expression. He shrank invisibly and replied honestly, “Nothing happened.”

…*A lie.*

Huo Wujiu was inexplicably annoyed, and his brow furrowed even deeper.

Did someone bully him when he went out today? But there was no news from his men in the city. More than that, there were no rumors at all.

Could it be something that happened in the palace?

Huo Wujiu commanded sternly, “Say it properly.”

Jiang Suizhou didn’t know why he suddenly asked such a question. What’s more, he didn’t lie.

He was confused. He turned Huo Wujiu’s words over and thought about them for a while. Finally, he captured a clue.

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Chapter 131

He was asking what happened in the palace today, right? Then the only major incident was when Lou Yue rebuked Pang Shao.

It was because he was drunk and muddled that he let those messy thoughts trip up his train of thoughts. He even forgot about such a major event. No wonder Huo Wujiu was unhappy. It must be because he was worried about Lou Yue, but he was acting dumb…

With this in mind, Jiang Suizhou replied, “Something did happen. At the banquet earlier, General Lou pointed at Pang Shao’s nose and berated him. Pang Shao didn’t lose his temper at that time, but his expression was already thunderous. Now that General Lou is back in the capital, he ordered his massive army to wait for deployment outside the city. I believe Pang Shao is afraid of his military power and wants to do something to him. After the incident today, Pang Shao will most likely act immediately…”

The more Huo Wujiu listened, however, the more tightly he frowned.

He was talking about irrelevant crap. If Pang Shao really wanted to make a move on Lou Yue, it would be the perfect opportunity for him to incite Lou Yue to defect. He was clearly asking him what grievances he had suffered today, but Jiang Suizhou was so concerned about other matters, more annoying, trivial matters. His voice was slow and soft, and this made him inexplicably distressed and more anxious.

He openened his mouth without warning and interrupted Jiang Suizhou.

“Was I asking about this?” He questioned, “What’s the matter with you today?”

He stopped him short. His sudden interruption was two-point heavier than usual. Huo Wujiu had always been domineering, a trait he cultivated from commanding the army for many years. When he spoke out of the blue, Jiang Suizhou was so startled that his shoulders trembled.

“W-What?”

——

This was the first time they parted in discord.

Huo Wujiu glowered at him. Jiang Suizhou lowered his eyes, stated that he was drunk and pushed the door and left.

When the night breeze blew, his eyes were burning, but his body was chilled.

He didn’t know why Huo Wujiu suddenly got angry, and he had never seen Huo Wujiu so fierce. It wasn’t a big deal normally. Even ordinary friends would quarrel after staying together for a long time. He never took such trivial matters to heart.

He just couldn’t help but feel aggrieved, even more so because he knew that the man could never like him and was about to get together with someone else.

No matter how he lost himself in various fancies and conjectures, they were all his wishful thinking.

When he returned to the main house, even Meng Qianshan noticed that he was unhappy. Too many events happened today, and the Prince was already spent racking his brains. From the look on his face, he must have just had another disagreement with Madam Huo.

He didn’t dare to probe any deeper. He waited for Jiang Suizhou to fall asleep, then dismissed the servants in the room and retreated himself.

Once the door closed, only an empty silence remained in the room.

Jiang Suizhou lay on the bed, but could not sleep.

He forced himself to sleep, but to no avail. It was getting late, but after a long time, he sighed in resignation and opened his eyes.

The brocade bed canopy, decorated with pearls and Hetian jades, reflected the faint candle light on the carved bed posts at the four corners.

He looked towards the candlelight, but what he saw was the couch under the window.

It was not spacious, and he recalled how Huo Wujiu had to bend his legs to fit his height when sleeping.

Everything was better then. Huo Wujiu ignored him with that cold front all day long, while he himself acted cautiously and neither of them spoke to the other. The two of them lived together peacefully, and he didn't have so many messy thoughts. Now, he even had trouble sleeping after Huo Wujiu uttered a couple of harsh words.

But…

However, Huo Wujiu's smile was seriously eye-catching. That day in the mountains, the stars at night looked more beautiful than he had ever seen.

As no one was around, he finally dared to stare at the couch wantonly, not caring what kind of expression he was wearing at the moment.

Just then, the candle flame swayed.

Two muted knocks suddenly echoed from his window frame, startling him.

"Who is it?!" He asked.

Then he saw a person's shadow dimly reflected on the window paper under the candle's illumination.

"Me." The voice was deep and soft. It was Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

“… It’s so late. What are you doing here?”

“Open the window,” Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou paused, and again, like an ostrich with its head stuck in the sand, whispered, “I’m sleeping.”

No sound came outside the window.

After a while, he slowly withdrew his gaze and tried to close his eyes again.

But then, with a crash, the window was suddenly opened from the outside.

Jiang Suizhou was alarmed and quickly opened his eyes. He watched Huo Wujiu leap over with one hand propped up on the edge of the window, followed by the window being closed again. After that, he stood majestically in his bedroom, wearing a single garment.

Jiang Suizhou sat up from the bed without delay and asked gingerly, “Why did you come here at this hour? What if someone sees you…”

He was about to roll over and get out of bed when Huo Wujiu walked forward. Huo Wujiu raised his hand and pressed him back into the quilt.

“Lie still,” he said. “The floor is cold.”

“You…”

Hearing his stutter, Huo Wujiu momentarily paused, seemingly unable to say something awkward. A moment later, he sighed like a compromise.

“Did I wake you up?” He said, “I have no other choice. I can’t sleep. Did I scare you just now?”

Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth but said nothing.

Huo Wujiu sat down on the edge of his bed, rested one hand on his quilt and looked down at him.

“It’s not like I was mean to you. What are you running away for?” He said. “How gutless; what did I do to you?”

“I didn’t…” Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth to refute.

But Huo Wujiu continued, “I was just a little anxious. You’ve been absent-minded all night. Did someone bully you outside? Why don’t you dare tell me? Even if I can’t set things right, is there any point for you to keep it to yourself?”

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Chapter 132

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes glowed fervently.

The lights in the room were dimly lit. Under the dim light, he could see Huo Wujiu’s dark eyes, looking at him with utmost seriousness and conviction.

This was an indescribable sense of security, and this even gave him a feeling that Huo Wujiu took him very seriously.

This was no illusion. After all, the two of them already had a good relationship, and it was him who indulged in fantasies that he shouldn’t have.

Jiang Suizhou fell silent for a moment.

And in this gap of his silence, Huo Wujiu also felt quite uneasy.

Huo Wujiu was not as indifferent as he appeared to be. After all, for him, this was the first time he had suffered from insomnia since childhood.

Only now did he realize that people lying comfortably in bed could also toss and turn, unable to fall asleep. This feeling was even more intolerable than rolling on a nail board. His eyes were wide open, and he contemplated in vain if he had said something wrong earlier, or whether Jiang Suizhou had really run into some serious trouble outside.

This kind of worry intertwined with doubts made him so irritable and unbelievably restless.

However, the person he was concerned about had already left. The doors and windows of the main house were tightly shut, and Meng Qianshan was

dozing off against the pillars. In the night, it seemed that the whole world was peaceful and quiet, while only he, Huo Wujiu, couldn't sleep.

Only he knew how much trouble he had suffered and how much determination he had made, so he flipped over and sat up. Without changing his clothes, he went and stealthily knocked on Jiang Suizhou's window.

Presently, Jiang Suizhou remained silent and did not speak, which made his hanging heart even more restless.

I wasn't too fierce just now, was I? It's all because I'm used to talking with shameless men like Wei Kai. In my anxiousness, I lost all sense of propriety…

At this turn, Jiang Suizhou finally spoke.

"It's nothing…" His voice sounded weak, as if lacking in confidence.

Huo Wujiu stared at him as he tilted his little head to look at him. He was clearly born with a pair of eyes with the bearing of a refined fox, but they appeared too innocent, making him unwilling to say anything harsh.

He seemingly deliberated for a moment before continuing, "It's just that today, after blowing in the wind outside the city and dealing with the fuss at the banquet, I feel quite drained after returning home."

Huo Wujiu didn't quite believe it, but his tone was much gentler, quite like being careful for fear of damaging a flower.

"Is that all?" he asked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

"I'm a little worried about General Lou," he added.

"Don't worry about him," Huo Wujiu blurted out.

Jiang Suizhou straightened up and asked, "But have you ever thought, he has incurred Pang Shao's hatred and could be killed by him at any time?"

Huo Wujiu surveyed him and raised his eyebrows slightly, asking somewhat in surprise, “So is this why you’ve been preoccupied just now?”

The darkness hid Jiang Suizhou’s reddish earlobes from lying to him: “… Yes.”

Huo Wujiu burst out laughing. The laughter erupted so softly, but it was filled with the pleasure of relief.

“Sillyhead.” He raised his hand, placing it on top of Jiang Suizhou’s head, and stroked it a couple of times as if to brush his hair. “You’re so fond of worrying about other people’s affairs, aren’t you?”

Jiang Suizhou refused to respond.

Huo Wujiu continued, “Don’t worry. Unless I’m still in prison, my legs are crippled, and I don’t have any contact with the outside world, this kind of situation will never happen, even if he has three heads and six arms, and is exceptionally adept at trickery. I’ll take Pang Shao’s surname if I let him succeed in killing Lou Yue under my nose. ”

Jiang Suizhou nodded, which fell into Huo Wujiu’s eyes as being particularly cute.

He curled his lips and smiled, feeling that his decision today was simply too wise.

Now, he could get a good night’s sleep.

“Are you relieved now?” He asked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded again.

Huo Wujiu responded, “Then I’m leaving, alright?”

Jiang Suizhou did not forget to admonish him, “Don’t let anyone see you.”

Huo Wujiu knew what he meant. He must never let anyone see that his legs were healed. However, in his ears, it gave off a sprinkle of charm. It was as

if they were on a secret rendezvous.

He beamed for no reason, and even felt somewhat wickedly excited.

He stood up, and before leaving, he turned around and said to Jiang Suizhou, “Stop worrying blindly. Go to sleep quickly.”

Upon hearing Jiang Suizhou’s “Okay,” Huo Wujiu turned around and jumped out of the window again.

After this meeting, the back view of that figure was a little more relieved, and his pace was briskier than before.

Jiang Suizhou watched him go and watched Huo Wujiu close the window again. Then the room regained silence.

He lay back on the bed and let out a long breath.

He knew that he should be happy.

Doubtlessly, in the original historical records, it was because Huo Wujiu was confined in the backyard of the royal residence and firmly guarded by the original owner that Pang Shao got the opportunity to seize Lou Yue’s military power step by step and execute him.

This time, Lou Yue would not follow the old path.

Then… What about Huo Wujiu and Lou Wanjun?

Still, no matter what would happen to them, he as an outsider should stay silent.

He just felt abashed.

He obviously should stay far away, but he coveted the warmth that Huo Wujiu brought him. This made his rationality lose its function for the first time and made him want to pretend that everything was fine like today; just to keep the status quo and stay by Huo Wujiu’s side.

Because other than that, he didn’t want to go anywhere.

———

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Chapter 133

All local officials in Jing Dynasty, as long as they were ‘sensible’, knew what it meant to step into the threshold of the Pang Manor.

The most powerful man in the dynasty besides the Emperor was the Chief Minister, Pang Shao. Even the Emperor listened to Pang Shao’s counsel. Sometimes, the Chief Minister’s ideas would turn into His Majesty’s.

Therefore, as long as they found a way, obtained qualifications and sent the silver to the minister’s manor, ascending to heaven wouldn’t be too difficult.

People who went in and out of the Pang Manor were all satisfied. After all, there was no more efficient Bodhisattva under the heavens.

Nothing mattered more than impressing the Chief Minister with money and making him willing to speak for them.

That night, Pang Manor was brightly lit, and a carriage stopped at the door. It looked very simple and ordinary in design.

It was not until the third watch that a man came out of the manor and happily boarded the carriage.

Another man in the carriage hurriedly asked, “How did it go?”

The man narrowed his eyes with a smile: “It’s done.”

The man in the carriage was astonished, and then revealed an ecstatic expression. He said in delight, “Is it done?… This is a great crime punishable by beheading the entire clan, yet the Chief Minister is willing to do it?”

The man laughed.

“We were lucky enough to catch up,” he remarked.

“Catch up with what?”

“Haven’t you heard? A few days ago, His Majesty seemed to have some disagreements with Pang-daren.” He said, “These days, I’m not sure whether Pang-daren wants to please His Majesty or find a way back for himself. In short, he is short of money, and he almost refuses nobody. The amount I gave this time is sufficient, and Pang-daren is pleased. Not only did he exempt me from my crime, but also gave me a cushy job.”

“What cushy job?”

The man smiled unfathomably and pointed to the southwest.

“In three years, I’ll be able to double the money I gave away today and earn it back,” he said.

The man in the carriage exclaimed, “But isn’t that General Lou Yue’s territory? I fear it won’t be easy to take action.”

“Pang-daren said that in about a year after Lou Yue’s return to the capital, he won’t be able to go back there.” The man said, “What’s more, Pang-daren also said that it is unknown whether he’ll stay alive in the capital for a few more years.”

“It turns out that Pang-daren is going to…”

“Pang-daren has his own plans,” The man interrupted. “It’s not our business either. But just in case, after taking office, we’ll have to be prepared for any contingencies, and better yet, make more money. After all, no one can say for sure what will happen to today’s dynasty, right? Besides, if we want to sit firmly in our position, we must give Pang-daren exorbitant offerings every year. All in all, that place is rich, so we need to pay more special attention to it.”

When speaking of this matter, the two both laughed knowingly.

The carriage departed with the rattling of its wheels and gradually disappeared into the night.

No one knew that on this shabby carriage sat the magistrate of Suzhou who embezzled 200,000 taels of silver in his three years in office. This person embezzled such a large fortune that the Ministry of Revenue took notice of him early on. He was already put on file, just waiting to arrest him.

It was this man who heard the news and rushed to Lin'an with silver overnight and knocked on Pang Shao's door.

For such a huge fortune, Pang Shao wouldn't shelter him if it were ordinary times. For him, accepting his silver meant looking for trouble for himself. This person was better killed, replaced by a more secure cohort, and thereafter would be able to pay tribute every year. He would have nothing to lose.

This man was nothing more than a dying horse desperately trying to live. Unexpectedly, he lived well and was actually healed.

Within a few days, the court issued a transfer order for the magistrate of Suzhou.

No matter how large the sums of money he embezzled were, it was all written off. This person was explicitly demoted and secretly promoted, and was reassigned to be the Magistrate of Lingnan.

No one knew that the new Lingnan Magistrate traveled south that day, passed by Lin'an, and received money from Pang Shao.

It was several times more than what he sent to the Pang Manor that day.

However, this money wasn't a reward from Pang-daren but was given to him… it was given to him to carry out an important matter for Pang-daren.

——

Although Lou Yue wasn't a person who looked down on civil officials, he had never saved face for ministers like Pang Shao.

With soldiers under his command, he was tough and had no qualms about going against heaven and earth. Thereby, in recent days, he stirred quite a mess in court.

Pang Shao suffered from his provocation several times in a row. Coupled with Ji Hongcheng who kept fueling the fire on his side, clashes between the two were bound to happen in court during the Grand Court Assembly.

Pang Shao wasn't as fiery or as frank as Lou Yue, so he was always defeated.

On top of that, whenever Qi Min sometimes could not put up with them any longer, he would step in to mediate with a couple of sentences. However, he too would be scolded by Lou Yue to his face. A few days later, the officials from Pang's party and the ministers led by Qi Min, who initially stood on opposite sides, were much more harmonious than before. When they met, they could even barely greet each other.

Sure enough, conflicts between military generals and civil officials were much deeper than the contradiction between the civil officials themselves.

However, Lou Yue brushed them off.

Every time he attended the Grand Court Assembly, all he did was hold his head high and blow off some steam. Only then could the suffocation in his heart dissipate a little.

This day, he even got off the carriage at the end of the street, and went to the marketplace to find some wine to cheer himself up.

He was unaccustomed to the fine wine that was served in the house, and preferred to drink grainy spirits distilled from sorghum. This kind of sorghum wine was common in Jiangbei, but now that he had returned to Jiangnan, he had a hard time finding a restaurant that specialized in Northwest cuisine, where their sorghum wine was most potent.

He dismissed his subordinates and went straight to a pavilion.

Unexpectedly, as soon as he entered the door, someone bumped against his shoulder before he could find a seat to settle down.

He turned his head and discovered a tall young brawny man, but with a particularly unappealing complexion.

He coldly said, “General Lou, someone upstairs asked you to go up for a chat.

Who could it be?

Lou Yue had provoked a lot of people recently, so he didn’t know where his enemies were. However, regardless of their location, this visitor definitely was up to no good, yet he was never afraid of that.

Seeing the man in such a state, Lou Yue temporarily forgot about drinking, sneered and waved his hand: “Lead the way.”

He followed the man upstairs.

Who else could it be? They’d either be Pang Shao’s gang of snakes and rats, or the poor and pedantic literati who championed Qi Min.

Lou Yue’s back remained ramrod straight. He was totally undaunted. When he was taken to the entrance of the humble room, he aggressively kicked the door open.

But the next moment, he froze.

The round table inside was filled with northwest dishes he used to eat in his early years, plus two large jars of sorghum wine. Sitting alone at the table, with an upright back and sharp sword-like eyebrows was someone whose silhouette overlapped with his old friend.

It was just that he was younger, more handsome, and more refined. He must have taken after his mother.

Lou Yue’s eyes burned.

“Wujiu, is that you?”

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Chapter 134

He watched as Huo Wujiu stood up at the table, raised his hand and invited Lou Yue with a ‘Please’ gesture.

“It’s me,” he admitted, “I haven’t seen you, General Lou, for many years, but you still remember me.”

Lou Yue didn’t know what kind of expression to express at the moment.

He stood at the door, unable to move a step. His eyes were fixed on Huo Wujiu’s face, and after a while they slid down in disbelief to look at his legs.

Those legs were supporting him well. He stood there, tall and straight, like a tree facing the wind.

Huo Wujiu naturally knew what surprised him.

Nevertheless, he stood in the same place without speaking, and leisurely looked at Lou Yue, waiting for him to speak first.

After a while, Lou Yue found his voice.

“Your legs… Haven’t your legs been…?” His voice sounded a bit hoarse, accompanied by a tremor. There was absolutely no trace of the calm and aggressiveness he presented when he faced Pang Shao.

Huo Wujiu smiled faintly.

“As you can see.” Then, he lifted his legs unapologetically. He walked steadily in front of Lou Yue, raised his hand and invited him to the main seat, and then sat down opposite him.

Lou Yue then freed his eyes and scanned the private room.

The room wasn't that spacious with several people standing around, all tall and upright young men. He couldn't recognize these men, but he did know the one standing behind Huo Wujiu.

Wei Kai, the child adopted by his old friend, was one who would seek ways to return someone's kindness.

Now, Lou Yue vaguely registered what was going on.

Tears flooded his eyes, and he hastily raised his hand to wipe them away: "I've been worried. I didn't expect that you, this child, were so capable that you escaped Pang Shao's eyes."

Huo Wujiu smiled and raised his hand to let Wei Kai pour wine for Lou Yue.

Lou Yue tilted his neck and downed the wine in the cup cleanly.

It was only after he drank the cup of wine did his shock and astonishment finally calm down a bit. He couldn't help but ask, "But how did you guys do it? After all, you're in the Jingwang Manor, a place that Pang Shao has been watching closely. Does it mean that…"

Speaking of this, he looked at Huo Wujiu in stupefaction, unable to utter the rest of his words.

Huo Wujiu naturally knew what he was implying.

He nodded: "It's Jingwang."

Wei Kai explained beside them, "General, you should also know that His Highness Jingwang has been at odds with the Emperor for a long time. Their actions this time not only humiliated General Huo, but also disgraced His Highness Jingwang. Without him, this subordinate would never have had the opportunity to enter the royal residence and find someone for an opportunity to cure my General's legs."

Lou Yue nodded at his words and muttered to himself, “See, I can’t possibly be mistaken about someone’s character…”

Speaking of this, he frowned in disbelief: “But, isn’t that Jingwang a cut sleeve?”

Before Huo Wujiu could respond, Wei Kai quickly explained, “That’s naturally fake.”

Lou Yue let out a long sigh of relief, picked up the wine cup on the table again, and drank his fill.

“The heavens have eyes.” He sighed.

Huo Wujiu lowered his head and let out a couple of chuckles.

“In that aspect, you can rest easy, General Lou,” he said.

Lou Yue nodded repeatedly.

However, Huo Wujiu’s tune took a turn.

“But…” He looked up at Lou Yue, his dark eyes sparkling quite deeply. “Although the Heavens have eyes, you should also know that in matters like these, Heaven’s will is useless. It’s all up to us mortals.”

He rested one hand on the table, leaned forward, and looked Lou Yue in the eye.

His stare rendered Lou Yue momentarily bereft of speech.

He understood what Huo Wujiu meant.

A moment later, he lowered his eyes and let out a long sigh.

“I knew it. You were waiting for me here today, not just to inform me of your safety,” he prompted, “Go ahead.”

“Even though I can leave now as it’s all too easy to escape back to Ye City, I have some worries, so I have to stay and can’t leave.” Huo Wujiu said. “However, I’m not staying here just to wait around for my doom.”

As he spoke, he raised his hand to pour Lou Yue wine and continued steadily, “This period should have given you enough time to see. You know better than me what is going on with Southern Jing. To me now, it just differs between raising an army from Ye City and tearing it down, or toppling it down on the spot in Southern Jing. I’m thinking, General Lou must have to make plans for the future.”

Upon reaching this point, he paused, raised his eyes to Lou Yue, and said, “I’ll say it straight. I have everything ready now. I just want to borrow the 50,000 troops under your command for a while, General Lou.”

After saying this, he propped his arms on the table casually and only looked at Lou Yue. Lou Yue didn’t make a sound, and the room fell into silence.

After a moment, Lou Yue spoke in a whisper.

“Wujiu, I owe you my life in the early years. I remember everything,” he said.

When he was in Yangguan, the snow blocked the mountains. His army was trapped in the mountains and could not escape. Seeing that their army provisions were dwindling, they could only live by killing war horses and eating the meat. Back then, Huo Wujiu was only ten years old, a young boy still growing. He took a team of light cavalry into the mountain and rescued them.

He owed this favor to Huo Wujiu; he knew this.

Still, Huo Wujiu shook his head.

“I don’t want to extort gratitude,” he said. “I just want to ask you. If Southern Jing is invaded, what are you going to do?”

Lou Yue fell silent and did not speak.

Huo Wujiu continued, “The current Southern Jing isn’t worth dying for. Besides, Sister Lou is only 20 years old, right? Where do you want her to go?”

Lou Yue’s eyes reddened a bit.

Everything Huo Wujiu said hit the bull’s eye. Since his return in victory, he had been troubled every day, and spared no time to think about these things.

But…

A moment later, he mumbled, “But I can’t commit treason. Wujiu, you should know that.”

Huo Wujiu nodded.

“I know,” he rebutted, “But what if they do you wrong and want to hound you to death?”

Lou Yue was speechless.

He had considered such a thing when the Marquis of Dingbei was forced to rebel by the former Emperor a few years ago. Undoubtedly, what the former Emperor did to the Marquis of Dingbei was downright chilling, but although he and the Marquis of Dingbei were close friends, he was an outsider and certainly could not do something like leading the officers and soldiers under his command to revolt and commit treason, just for the sake of his personal loyalty to his brother.

So he restrained himself and convinced himself that it was just a personal grudge between the Marquis of Dingbei and the former Emperor. He did not join the battlefield and forced himself to look the other way. This was the greatest concession he made.

However, year after year, wars broke out and people’s livelihood declined. The Southern Jing court also rotted to the core year after year. Since Pang Shao had taken power, it had even worsened.

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Chapter 135

As a military general, he was destined to be loyal to the monarch and serve the country worthily. However, the monarch and country had ruined lives and forced the people to leave home and wander about. These repeatedly shook his original intention of dedicating himself to the service of the country.

Nevertheless, he was also the defender of his country. Protecting the peace and security of the Great Jing was his mission.

Moreover…

A moment later, he whispered, “But they haven’t done that yet.”

Even he himself heard the hesitation and wavering in his tone.

He looked towards Huo Wujiu, and a touch of unease surfaced in his eyes.

However, Huo Wujiu stared at him silently for a moment, then the corner of his lips curled up as he laughed rather breezily.

“That’s true,” he seconded. “In that case, there is no reason for me to push you any further.”

Lou Yue didn’t expect Huo Wujiu to be so agreeable and let him off so easily.

He couldn’t resist speaking up, “But you…”

“There’s always a way.” Huo Wujiu cut him off, “By all means, eat meat and drink today, General. I will accompany you and not go home until we’re drunk, how about it?”

——

Indeed, Lou Yue returned home drunk that day.

Huo Wujiu's soldiers did their job well and managed everything in the restaurant. Besides, Lou Yue initially went to find wine to drink by himself, so their meeting was strictly hidden without the least bit of news leaking out about it.

After Lou Yue returned home, he fell into a despondent mood.

"Good boy… Tingzhang has raised a good child, ah!" he continuously babbled, but his voice was choked with tears. "It's just that I, Lou, have let him down, let Tingzhang down, and let his son down!"

Tingzhang was the name of Huo Wujiu's father.

Lou Wanjun was directing the maids to take care of him. She knew that her father couldn't hold his wine, but even if his alcohol tolerance was low, he was much more drunk today, so much so that he kept reeling.

When she heard his prattle, she couldn't help but feel amused. She asked, "Who are you letting down?"

Lou Yue shook his head and kept his mouth shut for a long time.

Lou Wanjun burst out laughing, twisted a handkerchief and wiped his face clean.

All of sudden, Lou Yue spoke again.

"But, he is indeed a good boy." He looked at Lou Wanjun and said, "If I can entrust you to him, I will be relieved."

Lou Wanjun was at a loss for words.

However, she didn't take Lou Yue's words to heart. From the moment she had reached adulthood, her father hated marriage even more than a lady raised in the boudoir did. Whenever he spotted a man with pleasing

features, who was a bit literate, and who was not missing an arm or a leg, he would consider these the standards of his son-in-law, and because of his lenient standards, the result was usually fifty-fifty.

Hence, so many years down the line, the number of families he affianced her to was enough to form an advance army.

Lou Wanjun chortled and dropped the handkerchief in the basin.

“Sure enough, you’re drunk, that’s why you’ve started to go around finding your son-in-laws again.” After saying that, she turned around and looked at the soldier, Su Rili, who was waiting by Lou Yue’s side and raised an eyebrow at him.

“You let the General drink too much outside again. You’re in need of a person, right?”

The soldier wished he could express his suffering. He shrank his neck and forced a smile.

——

Huo Wujiu was not drunk today.

He could smell the stench of alcohol on him and was thus not fit to go out. When they returned, he asked Wei Kai to visit the main house to see if Jiang Suizhou had time to meet him.

It was already nighttime. Before long, Jiang Suizhou arrived with Wei Kai.

When he came, Huo Wujiu was sitting at the table, flipping through the books on the table in boredom.

After drinking some wine, his mood was more or less bare, and his impatience with the book was greater than ever.

He rocked back and forth slowly while sitting in his wheelchair, flipped a page and mused about it. Upon hearing the sound of the door opening, he placed the book down and glanced up.

“You’re here.”

Jiang Suizhou sniffed the smell of wine.

“You went to see Lou Yue today and drank?” He sat down on the couch next to him and asked.

Huo Wujiu nodded and moved toward Jiang Suizhou with his wheelchair controlled by one hand. Immediately after, he felt that it was a bit in the way, so with a single leg, he forced the wheelchair to a halt. He stood up, walked to Jiang Suizhou’s side, and sat down quite naturally.

“I didn’t drink much,” he said, “That old man is getting older, and his alcohol intake is worse than in previous years. He drank only a little, but he was almost carried back home.”

Although there was no expression on his face, there was an inexplicable shadow of joy between his eyebrows. It was a far cry from that unfathomable cold and solemn appearance he showed Pang Shao.

Jiang Suizhou quickly asked, “So it’s done?”

Huo Wujiu shook his head.

“He’s stubborn as ever,” he remarked formally, “No matter how I persuaded him, he’s just unwilling.”

Jiang Suizhou immediately felt anxious.

Putting his sentiments aside, he knew how important Lou Yue was to Huo Wujiu. In Huo Wujiu’s plan, Lou Yue’s army played a vital role. It could be said that without Lou Yue’s soldiers, it would be absolutely impossible to realize his strategy.

“Then what should we do?” His anxiety compounded when he saw Huo Wujiu’s frown.

It was just that Huo Wujiu stared at him for a spell and grinned.

His brows stretched, and with a joy that could not be ignored, he raised his hand and stroked his back a couple of times, as if pacifying a kitten.

“Don’t fret,” he comforted, “You’re here, aren’t you? He’s being stubborn now, only because he’s not yet been pushed to the brink by Pang Shao. But as you well know, there are already hints of it, and more so sooner or later.”

His expression drastically changed. Jiang Suizhou immediately realized that Huo Wujiu was teasing him just now.

…*What a meanie.*

He gave him such a false alarm. In a disapproving tone, he chided, “Were you scaring me?”

He chided softly. Despite his scowl, he didn’t look the least bit fierce. His featherlight reproach felt as sweet as honey to Huo Wujiu. He discovered that even if the man in front of him scowled, he still looked captivating and entirely cute.

He crossed his arms and leaned against the soft pillow behind his head. He undoubtedly was the image of a mountain bandit chief with a mighty horse and a golden sword, but he seemed fond of tricking people.

“Not at all,” he denied loudly. His eyes were clear when he looked at Jiang Suizhou and said with a blithe smile.

“I’ve just had too much to drink.”

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Chapter 136

Did Huo Wujiu look like he had had too much to drink?

With those lazy smiling eyes, Jiang Suizhou was stunned and couldn’t help smiling along.

“Since you’ve had too much to drink, you should rest early.” After saying so, he attempted to rise to his feet.

But unexpectedly, Huo Wujiu pulled him back.

He lifted his hand and tightly grabbed Jiang Suizhou’s arm, using his strength to get up.

He could have stood up on his own, but he just had to drag Jiang Suizhou, causing him to almost tumble down onto the couch.

“You…”

Jiang Suizhou instinctively stretched out his hand and propped himself on the couch armrest, and then stabilized his figure.

He was about to speak when he heard Huo Wujiu say on the side, “Okay. Anyway, don’t dwell on it.”

Jiang Suizhou turned his head and stared at him.

“However, I can’t stretch my hand too far about matters in the court. I don’t think I can receive news immediately if Pang Shao really wants to take action against Lou Yue,” Huo Wujiu remarked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded. “Rest assured about this,” he replied, “I’ve had people on the lookout the moment I realized it. If there’s even a hint of movement, I’ll let you know immediately.”

Huo Wujiu responded, “With you, I can rest assured.”

Despite the unfading smile on his face and his lighthearted tone, Jiang Suizhou somehow captured a kind of trust and seriousness in his tone.

He nodded firmly as well.

Huo Wujiu leaned on the pillow beside him and said, “There’s just something that keeps bothering me.”

“What is it?”

Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu casually flipped through the book in his hand with one hand, but his eyes were locked on Jiang Suizhou.

“I heard that your father favored you,” he said. “How come Jiang Shunheng was made Emperor?”

This point was indeed questionable. Although Jiang Suizhou wasn’t Jingwang himself, he was a professional. Jingwang probably didn’t know some things clearly.

“My father died suddenly and left no edict.” He said, “Although he was not favored, he is father’s firstborn son. Once my father died, my mother was secretly killed. I had no one to rely on, so naturally I couldn’t compete with him having Pang Shao’s support.”

Huo Wujiu clicked his tongue.

“It’s a pity that I met you too late,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou was so amused that he burst out laughing.

“What? If you did early on, would you have deployed your army to support and make me the Emperor?” he quipped.

Huo Wujiu’s eyes drooped, as if he was seriously considering m m it. But the next moment, he raised his eyes, propped himself up on the cushion with one hand, and inched closer to Jiang Suizhou.

“It’s not too late to consider it,” he replied.

“What?” Jiang Suizhou failed to understand.

Huo Wujiu stared at him. Although his eyes were deep, his gaze was burning.

“If that day does come, do you want to be the Emperor?”

Jiang Suizhou naturally did not dare to take Huo Wujiu’s words seriously.

In his perception, Southern Jing was a state doomed to be ruined. The people who would wield power in the next few hundred years would all be rulers surnamed Huo. This was the inevitable dynastic change in a feudal era, and the historical trajectory of all of them.

If Huo Wujiu’s words ever became reality…

He, as a time traveler, would have changed the course of history of the Northern Liang exterminating Jing, and positioned himself as the Emperor. From then on, he would have changed from a history researcher to a monarch recorded in history books… Forget it, he was merely a poor teacher. He didn’t have such guts.

Jiang Suizhou refused to entertain even the thought of it and shook his head: “I don’t want to.”

Huo Wujiu, however, didn’t believe it.

“Do you really not want to?”

He leaned a bit close to Jiang Suizhou, rendering half of the latter's body tense. Jiang Suizhou gingerly leaned back and shook his head firmly: "I never thought about it."

Huo Wujiu looked at him a bit longer and chortled.

"You're really…" He sighed.

It was plain to see that Jiang Suizhou wasn't faking it. For a moment there, he couldn't figure out how his incompetent father spoiled him for so many years. How did the most powerful and rich man in the land raise such a timid and polite steamed stuffed bun?

His reaction puzzled Jiang Suizhou. He asked in bewilderment, "What's the matter… don't tell me you considered it?"

Huo Wujiu resplied without hesitation, "I did."

Jiang Suizhou did not expect him to be so straightforward and frank. But thinking of the results and his choices in his history that were entirely different from his attitude, he was even more puzzled: "Then why did you…"

His question stopped here, but Huo Wujiu knew what he wanted to ask.

"You know about the battle in Xunyang, right?" he asked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

"My father died, and I lost contact with both my royal brother and uncle on the battlefield." He looked indifferent as if he was talking about someone else's affairs. "With the few soldiers under my command, even if I escape, it would be difficult to survive, so I sought out my uncle first and rejoined him."

Jiang Suizhou responded. Huo Wujiu paused for a moment and continued, "My uncle and royal brother were both seriously injured and fell ill at that time. My uncle got sick because he insisted on returning to find my father. As for my royal brother, it's because it was too late when I found him. His

soldiers were almost completely wiped out, and I dug him out among the corpses.”

Jiang Suizhou perceived sombreness and a tremor hidden beneath his calm voice.

He could not make a sound for a while, and only looked at Huo Wujiu in silence.

Huo Wujiu added, “My father initiated the rebellion, and by rights, I should be the one to sit on the throne. However, the clan started an armed struggle with my father, and the outcome was inseparable from my father…”

He laughed mirthlessly and said, “Now that I think about it, I don’t really want to sit in that position. Our clan’s uprising was originally for self-protection, and now that the purpose has been achieved, handing the throne over can be regarded as compensation.”

This was something that Jiang Suizhou never read in historical records.

He only knew how tragic the battle of Xunyang was, but it merely appeared in thick and bold inks the annals. When speaking of that battle, everyone only pointed out that Huo Wujiu directed military operations like a God and calculated risky maneuvers. It was a rare and beautiful battle in the history of risky counterattacks. Unbeknownst to all, that one battle that solidified his title as a War God dealt a fatal blow to his entire family.

The family initially was just trying to survive and protect themselves.

Huo Wujiu fell silent, and when he raised his eyes at Jiang Suizhou again, Huo Wujiu saw him with such an expression.

His eyebrows drooped dispiritedly, and his eyes on him seemed to be overflowing with a splash of heartache.

Such a softie was a rarity to a man like Huo Wujiu, who had a heart as hard as an iron.

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Chapter 137

Huo Wujiu leaned forward for a closer look, and the corner of his lips broke into a smile.

“What are you afraid of? It’s all in the past,” he said.

But Jiang Suizhou whispered, “So, do you plan to go back to guard Yangguan later?”

Huo Wujiu raised an eyebrow. “Why would I go back there?” he asked rhetorically. “It’s deserted and remote. The Tatars don’t even bother raiding it. What’s the point of guarding it all year round if we can’t even fight a single battle?”

Jiang Suizhou was puzzled: “Really?”

He regarded Huo Wujiu, and Huo Wujiu also looked back at him with some doubts.

“Yeah,” he asserted. “What are you thinking?”

Jiang Suizhou wavered, some doubts surfacing in his heart.

Huo Wujiu wouldn’t lie to him, but… in history, why did he return and continue to guard Yangguan for a lifetime?

——

This was something that only Jiang Suizhou knew. He buried this doubt in the bottom of his heart, just waiting to figure out the reason from Huo Wujiu.

After that day, he went to and from the yamen of the Ministry of Rites as usual.

Work at the Ministry of Rites wasn't at all complicated. As long as there were no major festivals and ceremonies, the days were quite leisurely. Today, he strolled around the yamen and found nothing to do. As a qualified slacker, he informed the new minister of the Ministry of Rites and returned home.

To his surprise, he saw an unexpected visitor at the entrance of the manor.

It was a woman, but wearing a jinzhuang (armor for women commonly seen in costume dramas) of arrow sleeves, looking quite valiant. The servant behind her was holding something in his arms, like a gift, while she stood at the door, seemingly confronting the servant who was guarding the entrance.

… Isn't she Lou Wanjun?

Jiang Suizhou was nonplussed, and at the same time, some inexplicable nervousness rose in his heart. When the carriage stopped at the entrance, he got up and got off, just in time to hear Lou Wanjun's voice.

"Oh, are you not going to let me in? Okay, I'll leave then," she said.

The servant guarding the entrance quickly explained, "That's not it, Miss! It's because the royal residence has its own rules. This servant needs to report it first. Just a moment, please…"

The servant must have figured out that she was of high status and didn't dare to treat her lightly. Lou Wanjun, however, didn't pick up the olive branch and said, "This is no big deal to me anyway. Since it is so troublesome, forget it. I have arrived with kind intentions, yet you won't let me enter the door."

As she was about to leave, the servant lost his reason all of sudden and stepped forward to block her.

“Miss! No, Miss…”

He had never encountered such a person! She obviously rushed to the royal residence to send gifts. He didn’t make things difficult for her, but just because she couldn’t enter the threshold, she acted as if they forced her.

Just then, the servant heard a voice.

“Miss Lou?”

It’s the Prince!

The servant finally sighed in relief. When dealing with such troublesome fellows, even the terrifying Prince became kind-hearted. He expressed his gratitude, bowed to Jiang Suizhou, and followed behind him like a dog.

“This lady is here to give a gift, but she can’t enter the door,” the servant reported.

Jiang Suizhou looked at Lou Wanjun. For some reason, he felt as if this girl’s eyes lit up, staring straight at him.

“It’s you!” Lou Wanjun smiled brightly, and then saluted him with a cupped fist. “This lady, Lou Wanjun, greets Your Highness!”

Rather like a person from the Jianghu.

Putting her relationship with Huo Wujiu aside, Jiang Suizhou knew that this girl was entirely likable, frank and outspoken. This was supposedly comforting. After all, Huo Wujiu shouldn’t be entrusted to the wrong person. As for him, he wouldn’t have to worry about Huo Wujiu.

It was just that he could hardly feel a smudge of happiness.

He nodded lightly and said, “What are you doing here today, Miss Lou?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.” She pointed to the servant holding something behind her and said, “I’m just here to see Huo Wujiu. My father is worried about him.”

She also knew that her father was lying when he told her that he was worried. He got drunk till he almost tottered that day, and he drank with Huo Wujiu. Since Huo Wujiu knocked her father down, there shouldn't be anything to worry about.

Her father just had ulterior motives.

So, she wasn't interested in handling this job well either. She just had to go through the motions and say she couldn't get into Jingwang Manor when she went back. Her father couldn't beat her to death with this excuse.

But…

She feasted her eyes on His Highness Jingwang who was standing in front of her.

The man was still in his court uniform, so he must have returned from the yamen. She had never seen such a pretty man in the military camp. Moreover, he bore such a cool temperament and always gave off a gentle feeling. He was particularly striking.

Cut sleeve or not, it didn't hinder her from appreciating him.

His Highness Jingwang smiled gently and replied, "I see. That being the case, it's fine for Miss Lou to just enter the manor."

Lou Wanjun was still reluctant to enter.

She asked again, "I heard my father say that you and Huo Wujiu live together, is that right? Wouldn't it be inconvenient?"

There was no doubt that Jingwang was stunned.

Good lord, the beauty is shy. Lou Wanjun was somewhat excited.

This beautiful cut sleeve was more interesting than those big and tall men in the barracks. He could also feel shy.

She looked at Jiang Suizhou with burning eyes.

Unbeknownst to her, Jiang Suizhou was already feeling nervous deep inside.

Did Lou Wanjun misunderstand something? After all, he was renowned as a cut sleeve. Coupled with Huo Wujiu's identity, it was impossible for ordinary people not to misunderstand. It didn't matter if other people misunderstood, but if Lou Wanjun misunderstood…

Jiang Suizhou knew all too well what a domino effect was. Even if he fancied Huo Wujiu, he didn't want to let the misunderstanding separate them at such a time, and in turn let Huo Wujiu lose a good match.

But he could not openly explain to her in such a public place.

He took a breath, restrained his discomfort and said with a faint smile, "It's not inconvenient. This way please, Miss."

Lou Wanjun blinked at him.

The beauty had repeatedly invited, so how could she refuse for no reason?

"Then, thank you, Your Highness." She smiled at Jiang Suizhou and raised her hand to invite him to enter the door with her.

Even Jiang Suizhou had to admit that her smile was eye-catching.

He reluctantly smiled back and walked inside with Lou Wanjun.

Unbeknownst to him, that smile that fell into Lou Wanjun's eyes turned into something else.

The beauty usually exuded indifference. Although beautiful, he could only be seen from afar. However, when he revealed such a hint of a smile without warning, the flowers suddenly seemed to bloom on the snowy mountain. The original delicate beauty had become lively and seductive.

Lou Wanjun inwardly sighed and shook her head.

Who could withstand this? If he, Huo Wujiu, stayed by this man’s side for so long and remained unmoved, then it was him who must be blind.

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Chapter 138

The two entered the residence together, and Jiang Suizhou's palanquin was already parked at the side of the path, just waiting for his return.

Seeing the palanquin and Meng Qianshan approaching them, Jiang Suizhou thought for a moment, and then shook his head. He said, "No need, I'll take a walk with Miss Lou."

Although he was in poor health and always went around the residence sitting on a palanquin, due to the vast land area, there was only one palanquin at present. It would be inappropriate for him to sit in a palanquin and let his guests follow along.

Meng Qianshan quickly responded and instructed the servants to lift the palanquin away.

The place was a common prince's residence, but Lou Wanjun was more interested in the stance of Jingwang's large retinue, so she struck up a conversation, chatting smilingly with him.

Although Jiang Suizhou still needed to maintain that cold and haughty appearance, he was a bit overwhelmed, and before he knew it, he was chatting along with her.

He had to admit that Lou Wanjun exuded a vivid and lively attraction, brought about by years of experience on the battlefield and in the military camps.

The pair strolled while chatting, and gradually arrived outside Anyin Hall. The Prince's residence was vast, and it had been a long time since Jiang Suizhou had taken such a long walk. By the time he arrived at the courtyard door, his legs were already quite wobbly.

Lou Wanjun was keenly aware of it.

“Your Highness Jingwang is too weak,” she commented.

Jiang Suizhou lowered his head and said, “I’ve made you laugh. This Prince’s illness was inborn. There has been no improvement for so many years.”

Lou Wanjun shook her head straight.

Sure enough, if a man was perfect in every respect, even God would envy him.

The two entered the courtyard while chatting. Jiang Suizhou raised his hand and gestured toward Huo Wujiu’s quarters: “That’s the place. Help yourself, Miss. This Prince will go back to the room to rest.”

When they meet, they probably would have something private to say to each other, so he, too, should have some insight.

However, Lou Wanjun asked in surprise, “Don’t you two live together, huh?”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

Lou Wanjun sighed for some unknown reason, and then continued, “Well then, thank you, Your Highness. I have no more concerns. Go ahead, don’t worry about me, Your Highness.”

Jiang Suizhou hummed in response and nodded at her words. Out of courtesy and because he wouldn’t have any reservations after returning to his courtyard, he nodded and smiled towards Lou Wanjun.

Lou Wanjun cupped her hand at him with satisfaction, and led the servant behind her to Huo Wujiu’s room.

Jiang Suizhou watched her back in silence for a moment. Then, as if he was trying to escape something, he turned around and headed to the main house without uttering a single word.

He closed the door quietly.

——

Lou Wanjun had never liked Huo Wujiu very much since she was a child.

Since childhood, she followed her father wherever he was transferred. It happened that at the time when she could already remember things, her father took her to Yangguan.

Her mother died in childbirth. Thus, be it her father or the elders around her, they were more compassionate toward her. What was more, those naughty boys who grew up in the border had never seen a little girl, so whenever they went out to play, they usually took her along.

The only exception was Huo Wujiu.

Among the naughty boys at the border, only he had the worst temper and he always turned a deaf ear to discipline. Even Uncle Huo, who was assuredly powerful and healthy, would at times pat his chest in anger.

But he was tall and excelled both in fighting and horseback riding. Even if he was arrogant with his chin almost rivaling the skies, gave everyone the cold shoulder, and cared for nobody, the children still liked to follow his cold face around. They only followed his lead, just like a local overlord occupying a mountain.

On top of that, he, Huo Wujiu, was indifferent to playing with little girls.

It was during that time that Lou Wanjun suffered unprecedented ostracism, the bitter cold violent kind —— Although Huo Wujiu never poked fun at her, he ignored her. With a wave of his hand, he led a bunch of wild boys, hooting and hollering, to the wilderness, up trees, riding and hunting, none of which were activities Lou Wanjun could keep up with.

She was small back then, so she always ended up crying in anger. Fortunately, Huo Wujiu had a quiet older brother, Huo Yuyan, who was willing to stay, wait for her, and play with her.

“Wujiu is just a bit arrogant. He doesn’t mean any malice.” Huo Yuyan always comforted her in such a gentle manner. “Don’t argue with him.”

But Lou Wanjun didn’t listen to him. When she grew older, she learned martial arts and found ways to compete with Huo Wujiu. She believed that she would beat him down one day, become the leader and isolate him, too.

As a result, the cold and arrogant man surnamed Huo still looked down on her as if she were a young girl. Even after she beat Huo Wujiu’s minions one by one, he still never cared about fighting with her.

This was their relationship. Lou Wanjun one-sidedly considered them irreconcilable for more than ten years. Until now, Lou Wanjun would gnash her teeth in anger at the mere thought of it.

Yet her father even wanted to marry her off to Huo Wujiu?

Might as well kill her.

Lou Wanjun strode to Huo Wujiu’s door without knocking. The moment she lifted her leg, the door flew open in response.

She turned around and took the gift from the servant, raised her chin, and said, “Wait outside the door.” She walked into the room and kicked the door again.

The five-room large courtyard was pretty spacious, with luxurious interior and first-class furnishings. One could tell from a glance that this guy, Huo Wujiu, was living well here, so he needed no care at all.

While carrying her gift, she scanned the surroundings, and heard the sound of a moving wheelchair.

She followed the sound and saw a tall young man sitting in the wheelchair, with particularly long legs. It was rather degrading and an injustice to put him in a wheelchair.

The man’s eyebrows were sharp. One side of his eyebrow peak was marked by a scar, and his eyes under his eyebrows were like that of an eagle. This

was Huo Wujiu.

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Chapter 139

Lou Wanjun sniggered.

“Yo, are you crippled?” She walked toward him with a smirk, put the gift in her hand on the table beside him, and raised her leg to kick Huo Wujiu in his wheelchair.

However, a mountain-like shadow suddenly enveloped her.

Huo Wujiu, who was supposedly lame, stood up.

With his towering stature, his aura was remarkably oppressive, forcing Lou Wanjun to take a small step back involuntarily.

“You….” She stammered. She stared at Huo Wujiu for a moment before finding her voice, “You’re faking it?”

Huo Wujiu gave her a glance, lifted his leg and walked to the chair next to her and sat down.

“Is something the matter?”

Their long-awaited reunion wasn’t at all close to Lou Wanjun’s expectations. Instead, he was as proud as he was seven or eight years ago. He still so easily provoked a beating and made her fists itch for a fight.

Lou Wanjun glared at him, sat down opposite him and said, “I just came to see if you’re dead. What are you waiting for? Why are you not pouring the tea?

The latter half was addressed to Wei Kai, who was standing nearby.

Wei Kai shivered, hurriedly stepped forward, and poured a cup of tea for this aunt.

He really did not dare to provoke this lady, so much so that even his fear of her was already engraved in his bones.

There was no way. When she was a young girl, she could neither deal with the General nor beat him, so she could only beat them, his subordinates. Although they weren't weaklings, this girl was indeed powerful. They were no match for her, and they ended up badly battered every time.

He really didn't dare to recall these moments.

Lou Wanjun took a sip of tea and was about to leave after a short sit, but heard Huo Wujiu speak up.

"Why did you come with Jingwang just now?"

There was actually a touch of censure in his tone.

Lou Wanjun looked up and realized that something wasn't right with Huo Wujiu today.

This man, who had no dust in his eyes, treated everyone anyway he pleased. It was difficult to garner a smile from him, but even more so to make him frown. However, since she entered today, Huo Wujiu's frown had never relaxed, and his gaze towards her was extremely unkind.

Only then did she realize in hindsight, that she didn't know how she had provoked him.

This was a rarity.

Lou Wanjun laughed and said nonchalantly, "Why can't we come together? We met at the door. What's wrong with me chatting with him?"

Huo Wujiu's frown dipped deeper.

"Didn't he take the palanquin?" he asked.

Lou Wanjun replied, “No. Oh, it was parked at the entrance when he entered the door, but he didn’t take it and walked with me instead.”

After saying this, she felt that Huo Wujiu’s gaze had grown colder.

Huh?

This made Lou Wanjun puzzled.

This man never gave a damn about anything. Why did he start to fuss about this trivial matter today?

Lou Wanjun continued speaking, and every word was heartfelt.

“Speaking of which, although Jingwang has a poor reputation, he is really nice. It’s obvious that the court officials of the dynasty have been spreading false rumors. They’re the scoundrels.” She added, “I haven’t seen such a handsome man with a pleasing character in all these years. What a rarity! Don’t you think so?”

She watched as Huo Wujiu’s face darkened.

He didn’t speak for a while, and Wei Kai next to him was dead silent.

After a long time, Huo Wujiu squeezed out a few words from between his teeth.

“Don’t come to Jingwang Manor if you have no business here, and stay away from him.” He said, “Don’t come even if you have business, either.”

——

It dawned on Lou Wanjun.

I’ve always heard people say that we follow fate. Some things really can’t be forced. When an opportunity comes, it will come naturally, like a surprise dropping from the clouds.

For example, after all these years, she just wanted to beat Huo Wujiu, but she never had a chance. Today, she suddenly provoked him into a rage, yet he was feeling an unspeakable bitter suffering.

Lou Wanjun felt refreshed. After appreciating Huo Wujiu's furious look, she patted her clothes and left.

Only Huo Wujiu was left behind, sitting in place with a cold face.

True enough. Gullibility and complacency were the major taboos of the military.

He was happy just because Jiang Suizhou was no cut-sleeve, and the two seductively dressed men in the manor were no threat. He even forgot that someone could unexpectedly show up half-way and disrupt everything.

He saw Jiang Suizhou smiling at Lou Wanjun, and also saw Lou Wanjun's eyes looking at Jiang Suizhou. They were bright and wily, like a wolf that just wanted to take the meat back to its nest.

Huo Wujiu's gums itched.

However, he didn't dare to express himself. Jiang Suizhou's courage was not much greater than a hare on the grassland. He would bolt when scared, not to mention that Huo Wujiu also had unrequited affection toward him. Hence, he was more or less guilty.

Huo Wujiu was like a trapped beast in a cage, so angry that he spun around in his room until evening, when Jiang Suizhou came.

Naturally, it was because they had something to discuss.

Pang Shao had been making frequent movements in the court these days, and Jiang Suizhou had picked up some clues. Once these clues were pieced together, they'd most likely figure out Pang Shao's movements.

But honestly, Jiang Suizhou was harboring a guilty conscience tonight.

All the information he took out was irrelevant. He had checked with Xu Du earlier, but they were just ordinary corruption and bribery cases, which had nothing to do with Lou Yue.

But…

He had been on edge all day and was dying to find an excuse to meet Huo Wujiu and see his attitude towards Lou Wanjun.

So he dropped by with them.

He sat face to face with Huo Wujiu in a serious manner and listed out the news and information in his hands one by one. At the end, he said slowly and methodically, “I don’t know much about General Lou, so I don’t know how Pang Shao’s actions will affect him. Take a look.”

However, Huo Wujiu didn’t say a word for a long time.

He looked up in confusion, and saw that Huo Wujiu was seemingly frowning, sitting in place.

“Huo Wujiu?” Jiang Suizhou called him in bewilderment.

It was just that Huo Wujiu frowned more deeply and said, “You’re quite attached to this.”

“Hmm?”

The next moment, Huo Wujiu lifted his eyes and looked at him.

“Lou Wanjun came today. Did you guys discuss something on the way?”

He looked serious, as if he was really bothering about this trivial matter with Jiang Suizhou.

Only he himself knew that he just wanted to hear Jiang Suizhou tell him why he was smiling at Lou Wanjun today.

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Chapter 140

Jiang Suizhou was stunned, and unable to follow.

What did he just ask? What did …… he say when he was walking with Lou Wanjun today?

Huo Wujiu's expression was too serious, which made Jiang Suizhou's heart thump involuntarily.

Was he doubting what he should not discuss with Lou Wanjun, or was he unhappy simply because he got close to her?

Well, it was quite common to have some kind of desire for exclusivity with the person with a romantic relationship with him.

Jiang Suizhou suppressed the sourness in his heart, forced a smile, and said, "We did not discuss anything. Miss Lou is a brilliant conversationalist, cheerful and outgoing. She just likes chatting about gossip, so we did not talk about anything important."

Cheerful and outgoing?

Huo Wujiu's eyebrows were knitted close enough to pinch a flying insect to death.

The Lou Wanjun he remembered was an unreasonable and pestering female bully. When was she ever cheerful and smiling, and even staring at the man beside him with her eyes aglow?

Something was clearly strange, yet Jiang Suizhou actually praised her.

Huo Wujiu couldn't help but compare himself with Lou Wanjun.

He wasn’t much of a talker, let alone cheerful. Looking at the way Jiang Suizhou smiled at Lou Wanjun just now, he felt even more suffocated.

This was only their second meeting, right? The first and second time Jiang Suizhou saw him, he regarded him with nothing but unfeigned scowls.

Huo Wujiu’s thoughts swerved irrationally, which made his emotions even more unreasonable. With it, the look on his face grew all the more unsightly. After a moment, he spoke.

“You’d better stay away from her in the future,” he warned.

Lou Wanjun was most assuredly a bad apple. When she was a child, she pestered him non-stop for a fight and wished she could escape from Yangguan. Now, she would most likely pester the simple Jingwang. When the time came, the consequences would be unimaginable.

It was just that he noticed that Jiang Suizhou’s complexion inexplicably dimmed a bit.

“… Got it,” he answered.

Huo Wujiu nodded.

For a moment there, he felt guilty and even agitated.

What if Jiang Suizhou fancied Lou Wanjun? Looking at his appearance, he couldn’t say it was impossible.

If he were to break up the couple, would Jingwang be sad?

However, it was only a moment of sanity, and immediately, it dissipated in Huo Wujiu’s mind.

He thought evilly to himself, *Whatever*.

Let him be sad if he would be sad, but he just must not get together with Lou Wanjun.

As for who he could get together with… No matter who the person was, it was best for him to observe cautiously step by step.

——

Jiang Suizhou had no other choice but to temporarily divert his attention and focus more on court matters.

As expected, in a few days, Pang Shao made a big move.

And his big move was directed at Qi Min.

During this period, Lou Yue acted domineeringly in the court. Not only Pang's party suffered, but Qi Min's faction was also severely reproached and always implicated.

Today, Pang Shao sent a letter to the officials under Qi Min's leadership.

The letter noted nothing about cooperating with them, but listed several charges of great disrespect against Lou Yue. Some said that he roared at the imperial court; others said that he blatantly disobeyed the imperial edict, and even took care of some things he shouldn't be in charge of. He stopped several tribute beauties sent by the newly appointed magistrate of Suzhou to the capital for His Majesty to enjoy, and asked his soldiers to forcibly escort those women back to Suzhou.

Qi Min knew some of these charges, but he was also unaware of the others. In short, he wrote several pages. Although they were all trivial and would not convict Lou Yue, they were enough to enrage the Hou Zhu.

And at the end of the letter, Pang Shao also indicated his wishes.

He wrote, *Qi-daren and everyone should know that the consequences of a military officer taking power are not something you and I can bear. If he dares to rely on his merits to stir such trouble today, who can guarantee that he will not do something even more unacceptable in the future? His Majesty should be informed of these first signs of threat.*

He sent this letter to Qi Min with his intentions. Jiang Suizhou was surprised that Qi Min would let someone send it to him secretly.

Qi Min also attached a brief post script.

“Your Highness, you can see Pang Shao’s desires.”

Jiang Suizhou read the letter in momentary silence.

Although the content of the letter was short and straight to the point, without anything suspicious, when combined with the relationship between the lot of them, Pang Shao’s intention was utterly intriguing.

Pang Shao’s relationship with Qi Min wasn’t close. Naturally, sending him such a letter wasn’t a kind exchange between colleagues. Instead, it was more like Pang Shao wanted to take advantage of Qi Min’s potential and wanted to join hands with him for the time being to bring Lou Yue down.

He provided Qi Min with enough evidence, and even thought of Lou Yue’s crime for him, accusing him of committing great disrespect. Plus, he wrote that military officials should be scrupulous, and said that Lou Yue would do something bigger in the future, pushing the notion that he would most likely conspire against the Emperor. He might even assemble his own army and threaten the imperial power.

Presumably, he knew that his prestige in front of the Hou Zhu was not as good as before, so he wanted to borrow Qi Min’s mouth to accuse Lou Yue in front of the Hou Zhu first.

So, what happens next?

Pang Shao likely had a plan for the next step. Otherwise, he would not rashly accuse Lou Yue with such a serious crime.

At this time, Jiang Suizhou received another secret letter.

It was a message from Xu Du’s suicide soldiers.

The secret letter said that Pang Shao's men had traveled between Lin'an and the southern counties many times, and did not do anything else, but frequently entered and left the manors of the senior generals of each county. At the same time, the people under Pang Shao also intentionally or unintentionally had contacts with Fang Zhaohe, the newly appointed Lingnan magistrate and the former magistrate of Suzhou, who transferred to Lingnan to take office. It seemed that there were money transactions, but that was all.

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Chapter 141

Jiang Suizhou held the two secret letters in his hands and pondered for a moment.

A moment later, his expression gradually became dignified.

If he wasn't mistaken, Pang Shao's action meant that he was already secretly looking for a candidate who could replace Lou Yue. This candidate didn't have to be an outstanding general, so long as he was obedient and ticked Pang Shao's requirements.

As for Fang Zhaohe…

If Jiang Suizhou remembered correctly, this man embezzled and accepted bribes in history books, and his entire family was beheaded after the autumn of this year. But now, this person had gone to Lingnan to work in such a glorious way, even though he was demoted on the surface… However, Lingnan was Lou Yue's original stronghold.

Pang Shao must have bribed this man. He saved his life, and he became a part of Pang Shao's overall arrangement in killing Lou Yue.

As for what kind of action this person would carry out in Lingnan…

Jiang Suizhou mulled over it and let Xu Du immediately send people, horseback messengers, to Lingnan for a trip to investigate.

Xu Du received his order and retreated. Jiang Suizhou sat in his study alone, thought for a moment and put away the two secret letters. Afterwhich, he penned a reply to Qi Min.

Although Pang Shao's letter to Qi Min listed a lot of crimes, they were all superficial and innocuous, and at the end of the day, it was only to let Lou Yue suffer a scolding. Pang Shao's most fundamental intention must be to use this to sound Qi Min out.

That being the case, it was better to express to Pang Shao that Qi Min was at his disposal and make him believe that Qi Min, like him, was willing to lay down any grudges for the time being and go against Lou Yue together. In this way, Pang Shao could be at ease with Qi Min for now. In order to promote his plan, he would certainly disclose several vital pieces of information to Qi Min.

This information would mostly be useful.

Jiang Suizhou finished writing the letter and browsed through it while slowly blowing it dry.

The ink gradually dried on the paper. Jiang Suizhou looked at his name on top and gently sighed.

He knew that Lou Yue had refused Huo Wujiu, and Huo Wujiu had let him refuse, without coercing him.

But now, Jiang Suizhou wanted to threaten Lou Yue with this evidence on his hand. After all, these things could clearly tell him that Pang Shao had laid an escape-proof net. If Lou Yue kept hesitating for longer, wavering until Pang Shao sowed evidence against him, and making the Hou Zhu retrieve his military power and convict him, then everything would be too late.

Jiang Suizhou knew that threatening Lou Yue was their last resort.

Moreover, threatening him was something he alone could do. Only by carrying it out privately without Huo Wujiu's knowledge could he prevent any disagreement between Lou Yue and Huo Wujiu.

As for how Lou Yue would treat him afterward…

Jiang Suizhou folded the letter expressionlessly.

Just leave it to him.

——

Sure enough, at the next Grand Court Assembly, the courtroom was riotous.

Qi Min expressed abhorrence toward Lou Yue, just as Pang Shao had envisioned. According to the criminal evidence on the letter that Pang Shao sent him, he ruthlessly participated in impeaching Lou Yue, which successfully angered the Hou Zhu.

Of course, the Hou Zhu was not interested in what Lou Yue usually did. What concerned him was, why did Lou Yue act on his own initiative and drove the beauties that should have been sent to the palace back to Yangzhou?

For this reason, the Hou Zhu was furious. The officials on both Pang Shao and Qi Min's side followed suit and expressed their anger. For a time, Lou Yue's two fists couldn't resist pairs of hands. He was blasted so much that a red flush spread from his face to his neck. His complexion did not ease up until the end of the court session.

Jiang Suizhou stood by and observed indifferently from the beginning to the end.

He knew that today's incident made it the most suitable time for him to negotiate with Lou Yue. The courtiers had just isolated Lou Yue, so he must also know his present predicament. He could convince him easier, thus letting him defect to Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou was 90% sure of it.

Considering this, he secretly weighed his arguments. Only when the court was dismissed and all the ministers were contently exiting the throne room did Jiang Suizhou start walking. He kept pace with Lou Yue who was lagging behind at the rear.

“General Lou, hold on!” He raised his voice and said.

Lou Yue heard someone shouting at him, and when he turned around, he saw that a few steps behind him was none other than His Highness Jingwang who had welcomed him outside the city that day.

He was a pretty polite and sickly kid.

Lou Yue stood still and waited patiently for Jiang Suizhou to approach him, and asked, “Your Highness, what can I do for you?”

Jiang Suizhou walked toward him. Lou Yue bowed to him, and then naturally walked alongside him.

“I have no orders for you.” He whispered his opening remarks, “However, what happened today… is not at all optimistic for you, General Lou.”

He stopped talking and deliberately left Lou Yue time to respond. Only when he answered could he continue.

But to his surprise…

At the mention of today’s episode, Lou Yue didn’t say much, although Lou Yue showed a hint of annoyance, he had nothing much to say about it. Instead, he sighed and said, “Indeed, it is. I didn’t expect it. After not seeing Qi Min for a few years, how come he has colluded with Pang Shao? —— But, thanks to you, Your Highness, for remembering to stay behind specifically to ease me of my troubles.”

This in turn made Jiang Suizhou momentarily unable to say his next line.

H-He didn’t approach Lou Yue to relieve him of his troubles. He came to threaten him.

However, Lou Yue went on talking to himself.

“This General could see that you’re indeed a good person! From what Huo Wujiu said alone, it’s clear that you have a good heart!” The more he spoke, the more he was impassioned and treated Jiang Suizhou as a confidant

instead. He continued, “We’re lucky to have you! You’re not only Huo Wujiu’s benefactor, but also our Wanjun’s benefactor! I’ve found these two children to be the perfect match since they were kids. You should know, Wanjun is a proud one, but she can follow Wujiu day in and day out! Tell me, isn’t this fate bestowed by the Heavens…”

Jiang Suizhou’s mind was brimming with strategies and tactics, but Lou Yue blocked them all in his mouth.

His throat felt bitter, and his heart was sour, but none of these appeared the slightest bit on his face. He smiled gently and responded positively.

But deep within, he was already gnashing his teeth.

Forget it! He was worried about ruining Huo Wujiu and Lou Yue’s relationship and had to take the role of the villain himself! This being the case, why not leave the matter to Huo Wujiu and let him talk to Lou Yue himself?

Jiang Suizhou thought spitefully.

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Chapter 142

Although Jiang Suizhou let loose several harsh words inwardly, he also knew that the more Lou Yue thought highly of Huo Wujiu, the less he could do anything to ruin their relationship.

He listened to Lou Yue's chatter the entire way, until they reached the entrance of the palace. It was only then that Lou Yue stopped babbling.

"Your Highness and this General truly have good rapport. Please pardon me for letting you listen to my gossip for so long." He scratched the back of his head with some embarrassment.

Jiang Suizhou answered with a faint smile.

"General loves your daughter very much, so that's all right." He paused and then continued meaningfully, "However, General, it's good to be comfortable with debt of gratitude and of enmity, but if one day you provoked others' fear and hatreds, then not to mention a match made in heaven, even the safety of your loved ones may not be guaranteed by then."

Lou Yue stiffened, and his smile froze on his face.

"What did you say, Your Highness?" he asked in shock.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze, looked around, lowered his voice, and said, "This Prince has some information in his hands, about you, General. I think you're unaware that Pang Shao and others are already forcing your whole family to death."

Lou Yue was aghast, then became furious. He lowered his voice and raged: "I knew it! That old thief has been showing weakness all these days, but

he’s actually secretly playing tricks! Thank you for telling me, Your Highness. I won’t let him get away with it!”

Jiang Suizhou laughed.

Although Lou Yue was indeed an outstanding soldier in leading troops to war, he was upright and reckless. If he didn’t stop him now, he would most likely carry his weapons and smash the gates of Pang Manor.

“General, you don’t know yet what Pang Shao is up to.” He said, “If he intends to kill someone invisibly, what are your chances of winning, General?”

Lou Yue stopped in his tracks.

He was indeed impulsive. Listening to Jingwang’s words, he also realized that he was in the light and Pang Shao was in the dark. There was no chance of winning at all.

“Then…” Lou Yue hesitated for a moment, but his tone weakened. “What do you have in mind, Your Highness?”

Jiang Suizhou regarded him with a faint smile.

He was quite like a fox feigning innocence, but finally, he lazily showed a few inches of his tail to others.

“Not only does this Prince have ideas, but also has ways to help you, General,” he replied.

Lou Yue wanted to thank him, but looking at his expression, he felt a little lost: “Then Your Highness…”

“The Prince also has some favors that need your assistance.” Jiang Suizhou said, “But you don’t have to be nervous, General. Someone will send the time and place of our meeting to your manor later. By then, this Prince will lay down my chips, so why don’t you join this Prince and find a quiet place for a chat?”

——

Lou Yue naturally agreed to Jiang Suizhou's proposal, but when the two of them parted, the look he gave Jiang Suizhou was more or less tainted with some complexity.

Of course, Jiang Suizhou sensed it, but he brushed it off.

Whatever Lou Yue thought, he could only do so for now.

If he were to offer assistance to Lou Yue blindly, Lou Yue would bear the righteousness of his family and country on his head. There might be room for maneuver, but it was difficult to really agree to his terms. Only by forcing him to a dead end and driving him into a dilemma, where picking between the two sides was his only choice, would he make up his mind and make some sacrifices.

As for how he would regard him…

Jiang Suizhou told himself inwardly, *It does not matter. Leave it to him.*

Even if it meant suffering discomfort from letting a person he'd been on friendly terms with misunderstand him.

He got in the carriage and hurried away. When he returned to the manor, he summoned Xu Du and Gu Changyun to his room, agreed with them on a suitable time and a secret venue, and then had a dead soldier under Xu Du bring the information into Lou Yue's house covertly.

The time was set for tonight, and the place was arranged at the famous Golden Jade Pavilion Restaurant in Lin'an. Although there were numerous people there, there were often officials and merchants going in and out, so it would not be conspicuous. Moreover, Xu Du had already investigated. Pang Shao had a banquet at Mingfeng Tower tonight, so he would not meet any acquaintances of Pang's party in Golden Jade Pavilion.

After making these arrangements and asking Gu Changyun to go to the restaurant and reserve a room in his name, Jiang Suizhou silently waited for

the night to come.

Evening soon arrived.

He changed into his usual clothes, prepared the evidence he had collected recently, and got ready to go out together with Gu Changyun.

But then Wei Kai came.

The room door was pushed open, and when Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes, he saw Wei Kai standing in the doorway. He cautiously looked in his direction and informed him, “Your Highness, Madam Huo is looking for you.”

Jiang Suizhou was already properly dressed and ready to go out. The excuse he found today was to take Gu Changyun out for a drink and fun. Gu Changyun was now waiting nearby, and their carriage was already parked outside the royal residence.

Jiang Suizhou stopped for a moment and said, “Go back to Madam Huo, and if he has something to tell me, wait for my return.”

But at that moment, Wei Kai’s body swayed and a person behind him vigorously pushed him aside.

Jiang Suizhou looked, and saw Huo Wujiu sitting there.

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Chapter 143

There was no expression on his face, but his brow was furrowed.

While Jiang Suizhou was in a daze, he pushed Wei Kai away, controlled his wheelchair, entered his room, and shut the door to the outside.

“What are you up to?” Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou only thought about concealing the truth. “Nothing. It’s just Gu Changyun, who…”

“Are you going to fool me with words that fool outsiders?” Huo Wujiu’s gaze looked mean. He stopped on Gu Changyun’s face and looked back at Jiang Suizhou.

“You have been talking with the two of them for a long time today, and now you’re going out. What is it that I cannot know?”

Huo Wujiu looked aggressive and fierce, but only he knew that he had been waiting for Jiang Suizhou for the whole day today.

He figured that Jiang Suizhou was up to something. Otherwise, the main house wouldn’t be so busy today. However, Jiang Suizhou, who should have dropped by to speak with him long ago, was slow in coming.

Huo Wujiu had been edgy all day and finally ran out of patience.

He didn’t know why Jiang Suizhou was hiding things from him. He only knew that he needed to stop Jiang Suizhou and clarify things.

Jiang Suizhou knew that it was impossible to hide from him.

He took a deep breath and could only explain honestly and concisely, “It’s really nothing. I just have an appointment with General Lou and have something to say to him.”

Huo Wujiu swung his wheelchair in front of him and stretched his hand towards him. “Take it out.”

Jiang Suizhou reluctantly put the prepared evidence in Huo Wujiu’s hands.

Gu Changyun next to him was dumbfounded.

When did His Highness start listening to Huo Wujiu like this? And this Huo Wujiu… Although he sounded a bit fierce, his gaze on His Highness was both angry and helpless.

This was the first time he saw such vivid emotions on Huo Wujiu’s face. When the two were facing each other, the atmosphere they exuded was really that of cut sleeves.

Huo Wujiu had no time to pay attention to Gu Changyun. He took the letters handed to him by Jiang Suizhou, skimmed through them, and then put them on his lap.

“What are you going to do? Remind him, or threaten him?”

Although he threw the question, Jiang Suizhou perceived that Huo Wujiu had already guessed what he wanted to do.

Sure enough, without waiting for his response, Huo Wujiu continued, “Do you really think Lou Yue is a weakling and so easily scared? You’ve only known him for a few days. Do you know what kind of person he is and what he will do? Jiang Suizhou, you really have a lot of guts.”

This was the first time Huo Wujiu called Jiang Suizhou by his full name.

Jiang Suizhou hesitated, but still expressed himself somewhat defiantly, “I made a few preparations…”

“Then why didn’t you tell me?” Huo Wujiu questioned.

Jiang Suizhou replied, “You have a close relationship with him, so later… it’s still inappropriate for you to step forward.”

Huo Wujiu didn’t know what Jiang Suizhou had vaguely said in the past and what he was going to do in the future, but after hearing his answer, he couldn’t help but get angry, but at the same time feel helpless.

It was fine for him to think about protecting this and that all day long, but to protect him in front of Lou Yue? He was really stupid.

Huo Wujiu did not comment much. He just folded the letters a few times, then stuffed them straight into his lapel, and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

“Let’s go then.” He said, “Wait for me.”

——

In a very inconspicuous compartment in Golden Jade Pavilion, four people were sitting around the table. Among them, Lou Yue and Gu Changyun were both dumbstruck, so no one spoke for a time.

Gu Changyun was here as an alibi, the excuse for Jiang Suizhou’s visit to the Golden Jade Pavilion. It was just a trifling matter, but against all expectations… he witnessed such a shocking scene.

Huo Wujiu’s legs were actually healed. He heard Huo Wujiu say “Wait for me” to the Prince, but he didn’t expect that Huo Wujiu was talking about waiting for him at the Golden Jade Pavilion.

When he and the Prince arrived at the restaurant by carriage and entered the private room, he saw Huo Wujiu, who was standing with his legs intact, inside.

He only stared at Huo Wujiu, feeling a chill run through his body.

At some point, this man, who was once a cripple and bullied by others, became the War God who could snap necks with a hand. He didn’t even know it, much less Pang Shao, who had been stirring trouble these days.

And Lou Yue…

His oval eyes widened and he stared at Huo Wujiu in surprise.

He initially made full plans and was waiting to confront the unfathomable Jingwang. Unexpectedly, the one sitting directly opposite him tonight was Huo Wujiu, with one hand on his knees and a cold, solemn look.

Jingwang sat beside him without saying a word, showing a pitiful look.

“General Lou, take your seat.” Huo Wujiu was not polite with him. He raised his hand and let the waiters serve the food. He then picked up his wine cup and gestured an invitation towards Lou Yue.

The look on Lou Yue’s face couldn’t be painted, but he could do nothing about it: “Wujiu, cut to the chase.”

“Jingwang has also told you today, right? The present is different from the past. General Lou. I’m afraid you can’t reject me today,” Huo Wujiu said.

His tone was cold and unyielding. It didn’t look like he was here to discuss things with him at all. On the contrary, it was as if he placed the word threat on a plate and served it to the table.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but break a sweat. Lou Yue, on the other hand, revealed indignation.

“Are you so sure?” Lou Yue retorted unhappily, “You’re forcing me to commit treason. Wujiu, your father didn’t even do this back then.”

But Huo Wujiu said, “I’m not forcing you, Pang Shao is.”

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Chapter 144

Lou Yue laughed coldly, unimpressed: “What can he do? No matter how powerful he is, he is only a civil official. I have more than 100,000 soldiers and horses under my control, and presently, there’s even tens of thousands camping outside the city. Can he still kill me?”

Huo Wujiu remained expressionless: “Your soldiers are still Jiang Shunheng’s in the end. What if he wants to take them back?”

“Is there anyone else who can command an army of tens of thousands?”

“Pang Shao has already gone and found someone to replace you.”

“Then I’ll just take off my armor and return home!”

“He will not let you die a natural death.”

“I am upright, and have not done a single thing worthy of a capital punishment. What can he do?”

“As long as he stretches out his hand, planting evidence and framing you is readily at his fingertips.”

“Heh, I am in Lingnan. His hands may be long, but can he reach there?”

“The current magistrate who was transferred to Lingnan is already Pang Shao’s henchman. Do you think he can?”

The two of them argued back and forth, and no one showed any weakness. Lou Yue’s speech was inherently fierce, and Huo Wujius attitude was also cold and domineering, so for a time, the atmosphere grew tense with

gunpowder almost igniting in the air. Meng Qianshan and Wei Kai, who were standing nearby, were scared into cold sweats.

Once Huo Wujiu mentioned this, Lou Yue stopped.

After a moment, he frowned and asked, "… What did you say?"

Huo Wujiu smiled coldly, took the letter out of his arms, and raised it in the air. Wei Kai promptly stepped forward, took it from him, and handed it to Lou Yue.

"Take a look at it yourself." Huo Wujiu said. "He has already made his move. Before long, your military power will be reduced and a new person will replace you. After that, any evidence of embezzlement, malfeasance, dereliction of duty and even treason will be sent back to Lin'an intentionally or unintentionally."

Lou Yue flipped through the letters. His hand gradually began to tremble, and his eyes reddened little by little.

Jiang Suizhou could see that Huo Wujiu's means were different from his but had exactly the same goal. He must force Lou Yue to a dead end first, and then let him submit. But Huo Wujiu was a little too sharp and bold. He left no trace of affection, while Jiang Suizhou couldn't bear to do the same.

No matter what, Lou Yue was also a loyal minister to his sovereign. It was quite painful to see himself framed by a treacherous minister with no means of escape, but also at the end of his resources.

"As long as Pang Shao is in office for a day, he is determined to get rid of you, General. He is such an irredeemable villain. Moreover, His Majesty has trusted him since childhood. Don't take it too much to heart, General." Jiang Suizhou softened his voice and said. "However, you should also know that although the soldiers are under your command, there are thousands of ways to snatch them away. When a fatuous and self-indulgent ruler and treacherous ministers are pressed on your head, these soldiers won't become your backers, but will fall into their hands sooner or later. By then,

not only will your family suffer, but the lands of the state will also wither. It's only a matter of time that the people will fall into misery and suffering."

After a long silence, Lou Yue took a deep breath and put the letter back on the table.

"I understand everything that Your Highness has said." Lou Yue suppressed the tremor in his voice. After a moment, he looked at Huo Wujiu.

"I won't regret dying, but I will not let Wanjun be implicated," he said.

Huo Wujiu let out a faint smile, revealing a hint of understanding.

Lou Wanjun's mother was Lou Yue's beloved when he was young. She died giving birth to Lou Wanjun, so she was Lou Yue's lifeblood.

"However, if I pick this choice, I will be labeled a traitor in the future. I will be infamous. Secondly, one careless move and it'll be my death," Lou Yue stared at Huo Wujiu and whispered.

"I have no regrets dying, but Wanjun must not end up alone and miserable," he added.

Huo Wujiu's brow furrowed again.

What was he going to do then? Could it be that he would match Lou Wanjun with him?

Lou Yue took a deep breath.

"If I must agree, I only have one condition." He said, "Promise me that you'll marry Wanjun and never let her down in your life."

Jiang Suizhou's heart went cold, and his mind went blank in an instant.

He looked at Huo Wujiu and opened his mouth, but couldn't utter a single word.

He wanted to say something to stop him, but he was in no position to do so. But honestly, he regretted it, so much so that his heart hurt. He regretted that he did not firmly make up his mind to stop Huo Wujiu, and came to negotiate life or death with Lou Yue himself.

But now… there was no turning back.

His eyes blurred a bit, and he just felt empty.

But at this juncture, he was stunned when he saw Huo Wujiu leaning back in his chair, raising a corner of his lips, and showing a sharp but cold smile.

“General Lou is a bit too good at business,” he said.

“But even if my father is still alive, he doesn’t have a final say on this matter. So I advise you not to even think about it.”

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Chapter 145

Jiang Suizhou felt that this was more surreal.

He stared blankly at Huo Wujiu, only to see him sitting there with an extremely carefree countenance with his eyes raised to Lou Yue.

According to the original historical progression… he had no reason to refuse Lou Yue's request at all.

That being the case, was the truth completely different from what he had read in official records?

Before Jiang Suizhou could regain his senses, Lou Yue, who was beside him was already open-mouthed.

"T-This kid, you actually…"

"Have you asked Lou Wanjun what she wants?" Huo Wujiu folded his arms and frowned. "Why are you blindly arranging things for her?"

"She'll surely…" Lou Yue didn't hesitate.

"Then you're looking at things wrong." Huo Wujiu didn't beat around the bush at all. "We grew up at odds with each other since childhood, and still are to this day. You are an old man who spends all his time in the barracks, so why don't you just fight your battles? Why are you acting as a matchmaker as well?"

His words were completely impolite, but Lou Yue was rendered speechless.

"But…"

Huo Wujiu continued: “General Lou, you know exactly what kind of person I am. By tying the two of us together, we won’t become relatives, but enemies. By then, it will be counterproductive and not the result you want.”

Lou Yue was speechless.

At this time, Jiang Suizhou was completely relieved, feeling as if he had just survived a disaster. He felt like every single cell in his body was relaxed. Nevertheless, he also knew that this was a critical moment to negotiate with Lou Yue, so he could not mentally relax because of his personal feelings.

He quickly focused his attention. Seeing that Lou Yue looked dejected, obviously having lost the upper hand, and not saying anything, Jiang Suizhou hurriedly took advantage of the situation and persuaded him, “General Lou, even if you want to use your daughter’s marriage as a reason to rebel, that’s unacceptable as well. You’re afraid that historians will scold you for being duplicitous and a traitor for glory. Why do you think they won’t scold you for committing treason for the sake of love and embarrass you?”

Lou Yue looked at him and said morosely, “You have a point.”

“On this account, if you don’t act against them now, you can only sit back and await your doom and let them cruelly oppress you,” Jiang Suizhou said.

Seeing Lou Yue’s hesitation, Huo Wujiu frowned and said, “Are you afraid of what they will do? The worst they could do is just condemn you verbally and in writing.”

Jiang Suizhou followed, “Besides, this isn’t a question about rebelling or not. Hundreds of years ago, didn’t the Emperor surnamed Jiang rise up and overthrow the previous dynasty? The changing of dynasties is as normal as the setting of the moon and the rising of the sun. Moreover, isn’t the current Emperor of Northern Liang also a vassal of the Jiang family who rose to power? Thousands of years later, historians will be writing about it, but they will only be saying that you abandoned the old and welcomed the new.”

Jiang Suizhou spoke with overflowing confidence.

Lou Yue fell silent for a moment before speaking.

“See, see!” He took his chopsticks and pointed at Huo Wujiu. “After staying in His Highness Jingwang’s manor for so long, you haven’t picked up a bit of his knowledgeable and rational spirit. You’re like a bandit! It’s rude to talk to elders like this!”

Hearing his rebuke, Jiang Suizhou let out a long breath of relief.

If Lou Yue could say these, then it meant that it was done.

He couldn’t resist looking at Huo Wujiu, his eyes brimming with pleasant surprise. And the moment he looked at him, Huo Wujiu also turned his head to look at him. Although his face was expressionless, the look in his eyes was quite deep.

They looked at each other for a moment, and then the corners of Huo Wujiu rose, and he laughed.

“Weren’t you the one who hated the poor and pedantic literati?” he asked.

Lou Yue poked a chopstick of foot bitterly: “Can His Highness Jingwang be the same?”

Although Huo Wujiu was talking to him, his eyes were on Jiang Suizhou.

“Indeed he’s not the same,” he said.

——

Although he breathed a sigh of relief, Jiang Suizhou still couldn’t figure out why the facts were so different from the historical records. Once the meal was over, he pondered this question.

Huo Wujiu scurried up to the carriage from a dark alley behind the restaurant, and saw Jiang Suizhou sitting pensively in the carriage.

“What are you thinking about?” Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou blurted out, “Why did you refuse General Lou?”

Huo Wujiu was a bit puzzled: “What else can I do? I don’t want it.”

“But Miss Lou is…” Jiang Suizhou was halfway through his sentence when he realized his gaffe.

He initially wanted to say that Miss Lou was the partner who would accompany him in the future, but this must not be said.

He quickly stopped speaking.

But Huo Wujiu looked puzzled. “What’s the matter with her?”

“…She’s fine,” Jiang Suizhou muttered vaguely.

But to his surprise, displeasure surfaced on Huo Wujiu’s face when he heard this.

“What’s good about her, huh?”

Jiang Suizhou immediately discerned the aggressiveness in his tone, and quickly turned his head for a look. Huo Wujiu was frowning on the seat there, with dismay all over his face.

“She’s beautiful, nothing more and acts like a man all day long. Even her temper is terrible. Just because she was all smiles to you, you consider her a nice person? At the age of seven or eight, she chased Wei Kai and the others and beat them. It gives me a headache at the mere thought of it. I have never seen…”

Jiang Suizhou had never heard Huo Wujiu speak so fast and like a cannonball.

…Or speak ill of other people.

Jiang Suizhou had never talked behind people's backs, so when hearing Huo Wujiu's words, he blushed a bit and quickly stopped him, "Okay, okay, I know you don't like her. Cut the crap."

However, Huo Wujiu did not budge, and when he looked at him, a hint of hostility sparked in his eyes.

"Of course I don't like her." He said, "So you should also polish your eyes and not look at her."

This time, it was Jiang Suizhou's turn to be baffled and surprised: "What are you talking about? Of course I don't have any illusions about Miss Lou, ah."

When these words fell, for a time, the two looked at each other, and both did not make a sound.

All that remained was the rattling wheels of the carriage.

A second later, Jiang Suizhou couldn't help chuckling.

"What made you think so?" he asked.

Huo Wujiu opened his mouth and averted his gaze as if lacking confidence.

"Don't you also think I like her?"

"The two of you have grown up together since you were young, after all…"

"We grew up with Wei Kai," Huo Wujiu interjected.

Jiang Suizhou burst out laughing.

Huo Wujiu scowled and said with dissatisfaction, "What are you laughing at? I meant it. Do I have to like her just because we grew up together?"

Jiang Suizhou smiled and nodded frankly, "Okay, okay, got it."

——

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Chapter 146

Huo Wujiu returned to the room that day and called Wei Kai into the room first.

“I found out something.” He looked serious. “But it’s not certain yet.”

Wei Kai happened to have an important letter in his hand, and when he heard Huo Wujiu say this, he immediately regained his spirits and showed a solemn expression. “General, please speak.”

Huo Wujiu pondered for a moment, and said unhurriedly.

“Why do I feel that Jingwang’s treatment towards me isn’t unintentional either?”

Wei Kai: “…”

His tense nerves immediately relaxed in utter silence.

However, looking at the General’s cold expression under the lamplight, it was as though he was confronted by a formidable enemy. If he hadn’t uttered that, everyone would have thought that he was thinking about a major military plan.

“General…” Wei Kai started hesitantly.

“The way he laughed in the carriage earlier…” Huo Wujiu continued, “… isn’t right.”

Wei Kai said to himself, *You’re the one thinking wrong, you know?*

He didn’t believe it at all. It was his general who was acting abnormally due to his unrequited love.

However, Huo Wujiu continued, “Come up with something to help me test him… No, I’d better ask him directly.”

Wei Kai hurriedly stopped him, “Don’t do it, General!”

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes at him, frowned and asked, “Why?”

Wei Kai swallowed his words, hesitated for a moment, and was left with no choice but to prevaricate with the secret letter in his hand.

“General, why don’t you take a look at this first?” Wei Kai suggested, “My brothers outside the manor sent it with great urgency. It was delivered just now, saying that the content is very important, so you have to read it as soon as possible.”

Huo Wujiu frowned at him for a couple of seconds. He looked unperturbed, but he still took the letter and opened it.

It was written in the letter that Pang Shao’s son, Pang Wei, was sent out of the city today by the Pang family. He traveled all the way to the south. This wasn’t a big deal, but the Pang family had made a big effort this time. Not only did they send him secretly away, but also arranged a lot of people to safely protect him.

This was unusual.

Huo Wujiu read the letter from beginning to end several times, then said, “Send someone to follow and see where he is going and what he is doing.”

Wei Kai responded and then asked, “What did you see, General?”

Huo Wujiu held the letter and frowned, “Of course I can’t tell from this alone. But Pang Shao is keeping an eye on Lou Yue these days, and has sent someone to Lingnan. If his son, too, is going to Lingnan, then he must have gained something there…”

Just then, someone pushed the door from outside.

The two turned around and saw Jiang Suizhou standing at the door with Meng Qianshan.

Under the lantern in front of the corridor, Jiang Suizhou stood there, wearing a robe that he had no time to change. Beneath the light, he looked quite pale.

He stood there, looking at Huo Wujiu and holding something in his hand, but he remained motionless.

Huo Wujiu immediately frowned.

“What’s wrong?”

He quickly took two steps forward, and then suddenly remembered something. Feeling chagrined, he turned back to sit in the wheelchair, controlled the wheelchair and dashed to the door. He dragged Jiang Suizhou in with him, and then shut the door.

He noticed the trembling of Jiang Suizhou’s lips. Moreover, he clasped the thing tightly in his hand.

It was a tiny roll of paper, akin to a letter from a flying pigeon.

“…Something has happened.” His voice was a little shaky, and his face was full of bewilderment.

This was the first time Huo Wujiu saw him like this.

He felt his heart constrict, and the tightness made him so uncomfortable and almost breathless. He immediately got up from his wheelchair, and without saying anything, he dragged Jiang Suizhou, pulling him to a nearby couch. He let him sit down, then took what he was holding and unfolded it.

There were only a few strokes of words on the paper.

But it was clearly written: “Fang Zhaohe has revolted.”

Huo Wujiu looked at Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou raised his head. His face was as white as a sheet, and he said slowly, “Fang Zhaohe has arrived in Lingnan, and with Pang Shao’s money, he instigated General Chen Jun, the general that General Lou left in charge of Lingnan, to defect. Chen Jun now commands the 300,000 troops that Pang Shao left in Lingnan. If he can work things out, the 300,000 troops will be Pang Shao’s.”

Huo Wujiu’s eyes constricted.

“If the chief commander had defected, then the army under his command would be all too easy to control. Once they receive an imperial decree, making superficial changes to it to deceive the soldiers under him, and leading them to war, is easier than ever,” he said.

“By then… he’ll succeed,” Jiang Suizhou finished.

“So today, did Pang Shao send Pang Wei out of the city just to meet him in Lingnan?” Huo Wujiu asked.

After a while, Jiang Suizhou asked hoarsely, “What? Did he send his son out?”

Huo Wujiu nodded.

“…Then he must have started it.”

Jiang Suizhou took a deep breath, then said, “My men found that this summer, there’s already some plague of locusts in Lingnan. However, Fang Zhaohe never sent a missive about it nor did he comfort and compensate the bereaved families the least bit. If I’m not mistaken, he wants to use the natural disaster to drive Lingnan into chaos. Once refugees are scattered everywhere, he can pretend that there’s an uprising and lead the army into Lin’an. By then, whether Pang Shao claims the throne or defends the current Emperor all depends on Pang Shao’s thoughts.”

Although Jiang Suizhou tried his best to appear calm, his throat tightened, and he couldn’t hide the trembling in his voice.

Huo Wujiu’s frown grew deeper and deeper, and his eyes lowered as he thought about countermeasures and their chances of winning.

But at this time, Jiang Suizhou paused and spoke again.

“It’s my fault,” he said, “The locust plague started quickly. In less than half a month, I’m afraid Pang Shao will revolt. I was the one who had to provoke Pang Shao and Jiang Shunheng’s relationship, forced him into desperation, and drove him into this life and death struggle. This time, not only will Lingnan be affected, but the entire Southern Jing will be devastated, and it’s all my fault…”

Choking sobs gradually infected his voice.

Huo Wujiu didn’t know where Jiang Suizhou’s self-reproach came from. He just knew that this silly guy shouldered the whole world, making him unable to hold up.

He raised his hand, pressed the back of Jiang Suizhou’s head, and embraced him into his arms.

“It’s not your fault,” he said. “Besides, with me here, what are you afraid of?”

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Chapter 147

Jiang Suizhou was caught off guard. He was brought forward and slammed into Huo Wujiu's chest.

It was somewhat hard, but somehow, it gave him an entirely safe feeling, even when they were clearly in a critical juncture.

This was the first time he had been so flustered and completely thrown into a panic.

In the past, although Pang Shao was making progress step by step and the Hou Zhu was overbearing, he did not panic. Because he knew them, knew what chips they had in their hands, could cope with them; and everything was within his control.

But this time…

The butterfly flapped its wings and disrupted the course of history. Even if he were to plan the groundworks again, he could never stop Pang Shao, who no longer believed in the Hou Zhu and wanted to destroy everything indiscriminately.

He gently sniffed a couple of times.

"But…" Huo Wujiu's warm palm pressed the back of his head, and his voice buzzed, "In less than half a month, Southern Jing will be in chaos, so even if we besiege the city and kill Pang Shao at this point, it will be difficult to stop his plan."

He listened as Huo Wujiu paused, as if making up his mind.

"I have a way to secure the army," he said. "Do you believe me?"

Jiang Suizhou did not speak for a moment, nor did he move.

However, Huo Wujiu released an impatient ‘tsk’. His tone turned more lighthearted, as if he was really not afraid of anything: “I’m asking you.”

“But…”

“No buts.” Huo Wujiu interrupted, “You just have to tell me if you believe me or not.”

This was sheer coercion.

Jiang Suizhou stopped for a moment, and then whispered reluctantly, “I believe you, okay? Then what are your next…”

“Don’t worry about it,” Huo Wujiu said.

After saying that, he gently let go of Jiang Suizhou.

The warmth on the side of Jiang Suizhou’s face and the back of his head suddenly disappeared, and for some reason, it gave rise to a feeling of emptiness and with no one to turn to.

He looked up at Huo Wujiu and realized that he, too, was looking down at him.

“Since you believe me, go back to sleep,” Huo Wujiu instructed.

Jiang Suizhou said, “But you forced me to say…”

“Go back to sleep,” Huo Wujiu repeated. “I’ll go out, and when you open my eyes tomorrow morning, I’ll give you an answer, all right?”

——

Huo Wujiu coaxed Jiang Suizhou into going back. Then he took Wei Kai with him and went straight to General Lou Yue’s manor.

He wasn’t at all calm as he had behaved in front of Jiang Suizhou.

He barged into Lou Yue's residence, went straight to his room, and dragged Lou Yue, who had already fallen asleep, up. Lou Yue was sleeping dazedly when he noticed Huo Wujiu standing tall and stalwart in front of his bed. He also scolded unceremoniously, "Are you still sleeping? That old thief Pang Shao has already captured your nest, yet you're still sleeping!"

Lou Yue only thought that he was having a nightmare. He didn't realize that everything was true until Lou Wanjun, who came to the room, lit a lamp and illuminated the anxious Wei Kai and Huo Wujiu, who was pacing around the room.

"What's the matter? Pang Shao?" Lou Yue quickly flipped over and sat up.

"Jingwang just received a tip-off that Fang Zhaohe, who he sent to Lingnan, has incited the army you left in Lingnan to defect!" Huo Wujiu informed him, "It won't take half a month for them to find an excuse to launch a war in Lin'an."

Lou Yue felt even more like he was dreaming.

"What scheme does Pang Shao have, huh?!" he countered sharply, "His Majesty already obeys him at every turn, yet he's still not satisfied?"

Huo Wujiu had no time to explain the deepening tension between Pang Shao and the Emperor over the past few days, and only said concisely, "It's just an appearance. I'm afraid he now wants to kill two birds with one stone. One is to eliminate his enemy, and the other is to change the dynasty."

Lou Yue was stunned.

"How could that be?!" He said, "Even with your participation, it would be a drop in the bucket for these 50,000 troops to fight my 300,000 strong army! What's more, Lingnan isn't that far from Lin'an, with counties and towns making up the road. Where can they stage a battle?!"

By then, even if they won, the battle would drag on for at least a year and a half. At that time, how many people would have died?

Lou Yue didn’t dare to think about it.

“That’s why we have to strike first,” Huo Wujiu said.

Lou Yue quickly asked, “Do you have a countermeasure?”

Huo Wujiu pondered for a moment.

“I’m just taking a risk,” he said. “The only solution for now is to borrow Northern Liang’s soldiers.”

When Lou Yue heard this, he knew that Huo Wujiu had already made contact with Northern Liang, and was relieved.

“That’s great,” he said.

But Huo Wujiu said, “However, I want to borrow some of your soldiers and horses. I want light cavalry, fast-footed, and the more the better.”

Lou Yue was puzzled: “Why?”

Huo Wujiu looked at him and said in a deep voice, “People from Northern Liang can’t be totally trusted.”

Lou Yue was startled: “You mean…”

He hesitated to continue.

From the onset, he was quite surprised. With Huo Wujiu’s ability, how could he easily be captured? Either Southern Jing had prepared in advance, or someone of Huo Wujiu’s… had betrayed him.

With Huo Wujiu’s remark, it must be the latter.

Then Huo Wujiu nodded: “It’s just a guess.”

Lou Wanjun, who had been quietly listening to the conversation between the two, could not help but frown and say, “Then if you step forward, won’t you be courting death?”

“That’s why I’m going to lead the army.” Huo Wujiu said. “You need to propose to Jiang Shunheng in the next few days and find some random excuse to send some of the army to the river bank. If the number isn’t considerable, he won’t stop you. Later, I will lead the army forward and set an ambush in the south bank. If they lower their guard, we can first capture the leader of the traitors, and the rest of the troops will be at my disposal.”

Lou Yue argued, “But how can you be sure that they will lead troops across the river?”

Huo Wujiu looked at him.

“They will definitely come.”

Beside them, Lou Wanjun mused, “If they want to help you, they will definitely come back; if they want to kill you … they won’t let go of the opportunity, right?”

Huo Wujiu nodded slowly.

Lou Yue deliberated for a long time and took a deep breath: “I will do things according to your arrangement.”

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Chapter 148

Just then Huo Wujiu suddenly added, “There is one more thing that you must do.”

Lou Yue asked, “What is it?”

Huo Wujiu looked at him.

“My life and death is uncertain, and there may not be peace in the capital,” he said, “Pang Shao is keeping a close eye on Jingwang Manor. If there’s a war on the river bank, it’s impossible for the capital to be undisturbed.”

Lou Yue nodded.

“The remaining forces under your command must defend the city, you must not release any important person,” he advised.

Lou Yue replied, “You can rest assured, but you need to go and return quickly. There are garrisons in the surrounding counties. If they rush reinforcements to Lin’an at that time, we may not be able to hold on for long.”

Huo Wujiu nodded and then said, “There is also Jingwang.”

Lou Yue failed to understand: “What about Jingwang?”

Huo Wujiu looked at him deeply with unprecedented solemnity and seriousness.

“Protect him well. If he is hurt in the slightest, I’ll kill you.”

——

Early morning of the next day, the morning sun rose, and the city of Lin'an was still serene and beautiful. There wasn't a hint of a dark tide at all.

The same was true in the courtroom.

Lou Yue was still fond of stirring trouble, and his indiscreet remarks and criticisms changed not a bit. Two days ago, he impeached Pang Shao, and today, he criticized the lack of defense in the northern border of the Great Jing, thinking that they could sleep in comfort relying on the natural moat near the river when in fact, it was difficult to contain foreign aggression. In the final analysis, it was due to Pang Shao's lazy governance. He also suspected that he was embezzling state funds.

The Hou Zhu had been listening to him berate Pang Shao. After a long time, he was not only fed up with Pang Shao, but also fed up with Lou Yue.

He got a headache from Lou Yue's booming voice and simply asked, "So, what does General Lou want?"

Lou Yue's straightened his back and responded with a voice as loud as a bell, "Of course, this General wants to strengthen our defense in case of any danger."

The Hou Zhu just felt a throbbing headache.

Although he only wasted money on romantic affairs every day, he was also aware of how much money he had in his pocket. The money was meant to support the beauties in his palace, his rich and privileged life, and the exotic animals in his imperial hunting park, so how could he afford to raise some useless military forces?

He waved his hand and said, "Then let your soldiers take the task, Aiqing. Aren't there 50,000 of your soldiers outside the city? Set aside five thousand and send them there for now."

Lou Yue showed displeasure: "But…"

“No buts.” The Hou Zhu didn’t leave any room for compromise. “We can’t dispatch troops either. Anyway, your soldiers are going to be sent to a useful place sooner or later. Sending them now will save you some money for army provisions.”

Lou Yue was rendered speechless.

The matter was then settled.

Outside the city, the soldiers were buzzing with activity, and inside the Jingwang Manor, Jiang Suizhou also learned about Huo Wujiu’s plan.

However, Huo Wujiu didn’t tell him everything.

He only said that he sent a missive by pigeon to Li Sheng, the defender of the north of the river. In a few days, Li Sheng would command 150,000 soldiers and send them across the river.

This time, he would follow Lou Yue’s troops to Jiangbei and take command of the 150,000 soldiers. After that, Lou Yue would besiege the city, and he would lead the troops for reinforcement. The day the 200,000 soldiers surrounded Lin’an would be the death of Pang Shao and Jiang Shunheng.

By then, they could quickly secure Lin’an, and then quickly march to Lingnan to block the 300,000 troops Lingnan and kill Pang Shao’s son and traitor generals. When that happened, the whole of Southern Jing would fall into their hands.

Jiang Suizhou brooded over it, but could not see any flaws in this plan. Nevertheless…

He was still quite uneasy.

If it was so easy for Huo Wujiu to move his troops, why didn’t he come up with such a simple strategy before? Since he was already moving freely and no one could catch him, why did he have to infiltrate the 5000 soldiers under Lou Yue?

He had some doubts deep inside, and the closer the day of Huo Wujiu's departure, the more uneasy he became.

This went on until the day before his departure. He returned from the Yamen, and it was already nightfall.

He walked back to the Anyin Hall, but did not go to the main room. Instead, he stopped in the yard and went to Huo Wujiu's room.

Huo Wujiu was sitting there, watching Wei Kai sort out their luggage.

They didn't have much to bring, so it was easy to pack. When Huo Wujiu saw him enter, he raised his head and waved at him.

"Come here," he said, "What's up?"

Jiang Suizhou replied, "I just came to see…"

Huo Wujiu got up and went to pour him tea, but Jiang Suizhou stopped him. He looked up at Huo Wujiu, kept silent for a second, and then said, "I'm still a little worried…"

Huo Wu Jiu smiled and said genty, "What are you worried about? There's going to be 200,000 soldiers. Even if Pang Shao has twice as many soldiers in his hands, there is nothing to be afraid of."

"But what I'm afraid of is…" Jiang Suizhou frowned. "I'm just guessing, but can the Liang Dynasty's soldiers be fully trusted?"

Huo Wujiu stilled imperceptibly, but it was fleeting.

He chuckled.

"Those soldiers are all from the Huo family. What's there not to trust? Don't think too much," he said.

"But…"

However, Huo Wujiu gazed at him nonchalantly and said, “What? Have you got nothing better to do than dwell on it?”

Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth and was about to retort.

But Huo Wujiu raised his hand, pulled his wrist, and then raised his hand to signal Wei Kai.

“All right, don’t overthink. Let’s get you something to do,” Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou quickly asked, “What can I do?”

“Lou Yue is going to treat the army outside the city tonight. I’ll take you there.”

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Chapter 149

Jiang Suizhou did not expect Huo Wujiu to bring him directly to the city wall.

It was dark, and the soldiers' tents under the walls were lit by fire. The walls, on the other hand, were dark, and nothing was visible. Huo Wujiu skillfully found a blind spot from the guards, and led Jiang Suizhou to leap up on the wall.

The walls of Lin'an were quite high, separating the inside and outside of the city into two worlds.

The city was ablaze with lights, while outside the city, bright tents were scattered all over the place.

Huo Wujiu led Jiang Suizhou and sat at the edge of the city wall.

When Jiang Suizhou lowered his head, he could see a buzz of activity.

This scenery was different from the city. The tents were illuminated by steaming fire on the ground. The soldiers around the fire were boisterous, chatting with laughter and poking fun at each other, as if they were boiling up by the flame.

They sat on the ground, and their wine and food were also laid on the ground. The aroma of wine and meat with the rising steam billowed up together.

Jiang Suizhou's eyes widened for a moment.

"How lively," he said. "Do they do this every day?"

“It’s because we’re leaving tomorrow; that’s why they’re acting so,” Huo Wujiu answered beside him. “This is a rule in the army.”

It was as if he had always sat on city walls. Obviously, there was a space of more than ten feet hanging under his feet, but his legs dangled back and forth idly. He even lifted his other leg and stepped on the edge of the city wall.

On the contrary, Jiang Suizhou was quite nervous. Huo Wujiu supported him when he sat and he no longer dared to move.

“It’ll be hard work for days later on,” Jiang Suizhou said and looked at Huo Wujiu. “Will you be with them tomorrow?”

Huo Wujiu put his arm on his knee and looked sideways at Jiang Suizhou: “Lou Yue has already sent two sets of military uniforms. Wei Kai and I will sneak in tomorrow.”

“Won’t they discover you?” Jiang Suizhou asked.

“The one leading the army is Ji Hongcheng.” Huo Wujiu said. “He’s reliable. Rest assured.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

Then, he heard Huo Wujiu say, “It’s you. Although I can go back and forth fast, and Lou Yue is in the city, you should be careful and not let Pang Shao find out.”

Jiang Suizhou responded, “Okay.”

Huo Wujiu added, “Some of my men will remain in the city, and they will protect you henceforth. Tomorrow, one of my subordinates will enter the residence. You don’t have to worry about him. He knows what to do.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“Ahem…” he looked askance at Huo Wujiu: “Is there really no danger?”

Huo Wujiu looked down at him.

He dared not tell the truth.

Huo Wujiu did not know how many troops the other parties would bring, what kind of thoughts they would have, and what kind of generals they would send.

These were the odds he was uncertain of. He couldn’t even say what their chances of winning were. The only thing he was sure of was that he would not let Jiang Suizhou be alone in danger for too long, no matter what.

He raised his hand to caress Jiang Suizhou’s hair, but when his hand was halfway up, he stopped.

Huo Wujiu said with certainty, “Nothing will happen to you; you’re safe, don’t worry.”

Jiang Suizhou stared at him.

If he was still the same person as he was a few months ago, he would never be worried one bit. Who was Huo Wujiu? The War God of the Great Liang, the man invincible in battle. He might have botched up once, but there would never be a second time. In front of him, nothing was a problem.

But now…

Huo Wujiu wasn’t the general who was endowed with immortality in the history books.

He was his beloved.

After a long pause, Jiang Suizhou slowly spoke.

“Then you must stand by your word.” He said, “You can’t lie to me.”

——

Early the next morning, the army outside the city marched off.

Huo Wujiu's movements were quite secretive and swift. When Jiang Suizhou got up early in the morning and rushed to his room, the man in the wheelchair was no longer Huo Wujiu.

It was a young man about the same height as him. When the man saw him enter the room, he looked at him up and down, stood up and said to Jiang Suizhou, "Are you His Highness Jingwang? My name is Nie Yao. The General specially ordered this subordinate to protect Your Highness."

Jiang Suizhou froze before he found his voice and said, "… He's gone?"

Nie Yao answered, "An hour ago, I sent the General out of the city."

Jiang Suizhou lowered his eyes and whispered after a while, "So early…"

Nie Yao nodded, "Yes. The General has specially instructed me not to disturb your rest."

Jiang Suizhou smiled at him, but somehow the corners of his mouth drooped a bit, and his smile appeared forced: "Got it. Just stay here at ease. I have already instructed Meng Qianshan, so you don't have to worry about food and clothing. If you need anything, I will definitely come to you."

Nie Yao cupped his hands and responded positively. Jiang Suizhou then turned around and went out.

When the door was closed, the early summer breeze in early June was obviously gentle, but Jiang Suizhou felt a little cold.

He turned around and stared at the closed door.

He didn't even notice that since he transmigrated, this was the first day Huo Wujiu was not by his side.

He felt so uncomfortable that he felt as if the whole world had gone empty.

He turned around and returned to the main courtyard as if nothing had happened.

Huo Wujiu had made extremely thorough arrangements for him.

Although Lou Yue remained as domineering as usual in the court, he was secretly cooperating with him, acting strong on the surface but was actually weakened by Pang Shao step by step. From time to time he also performed some incompetent rage.

With Lou Yue diverting Pang Shao's attention, it was quite convenient for Jiang Suizhou to act. He sent people to closely monitor Pang Shao's every move, and also to keep an eye out for any unusual actions.

Pang Shao had indeed been busy in recent days. In addition to taking care of Lou Yue, a lot of issues outside the city also required his attention. Daily missive exchanges occupied him instead of caring about Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou knew that those must be related to Lingnan.

Among Pang Shao's numerous exchanges, he apprehended one or two.

The locust plague in Lingnan was getting worse, but news about it had been suppressed. Pang Wei had already arrived in Lingnan, just waiting for the opportunity to incite the people, and make use of the momentum to let the army revolt.

It was enough to prove that Fang Zhaohe was truly insane.

With just a few sporadic pieces of news, Jiang Suizhou realized that Pang Shao didn't intend to let Fang Zhaohe live at all. The locust plague, his embezzlement, concealment and failure to report; stacking these crimes together would definitely kill Fang Zhaohe. By then, the army in Lingnan would revolt, endangering Lin'an. After the death of the Hou Zhu, Pang Shao could pretend to 'suppress' the rebellion, so he would most definitely denounce someone publicly for his crimes. Fang Zhaohe was the perfect scapegoat to take the blame.

Presently, however, Fang Zhaohe only cared about working for Pang Shao.

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Chapter 150

Jiang Suizhou closely observed Pang Shao's every move, but in just around eight days, Lou Wanjun had sneaked to his manor several times. She didn't visit him for anything and just chatted with him out of boredom.

After several times, Jiang Suizhou finally couldn't help but voice out his doubts.

It happened to be at night. He was sorting out the news under the lamp, while Lou Wanjun was sitting on a chair nearby, idly drinking tea and eating snacks.

"Who asked you to come these times?" Jiang Suizhou asked.

Lou Wanjun froze for a second and said with a smile, "I wanted to come myself. I have nothing to do at home, but you are having fun here.""

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but laugh.

"What am I doing here?" he retorted, "Tell me, is it Huo Wujiu?"

Lou Wanjun kept her mouth shut, thought for a while, and then admitted it.

"How did you know?" she asked.

Jiang Suizhou smiled: "It was just a hunch. I didn't expect to guess correctly—— What did he ask you to do?"

Lou Wanjun leaned back in her chair.

"He's worried about you." She said, "I do not know what is there for Madam to worry about, but he warned my father harshly. My father also

dares not disobey, so he could only send me, the idle one, here day by day to see what danger in your residence there can be, so as to protect you ah.”

All Jiang Suizhou thought was that this method was stupid.

After a while, he smiled helplessly.

“It’s really…”

Lou Wanjun’s eyes brightly looked at him.

“Did you notice something too?” she asked.

Jiang Suizhou was stunned: “What?”

Lou Wanjun said, “Huo Wujiu!”

Jiang Suizhou was puzzled: “What’s wrong with Huo Wujiu?”

Lou Wanjun sighed. After staring at him for a while, she mumbled to herself, “That can’t be. You’re a cut sleeve, so how come you can’t even see this?”

Jiang Suizhou’s heart skipped a beat: “What do you mean?”

His gaze faintly contained a shadow of disbelief and expectation.

Lou Wanjun captured it almost instantly.

She gave him a heated smile.

“It’s nothing.” She said, “Wait for him to come back and let him tell you himself.”

——

Meanwhile, dark shadows were distinctly reflected on the surface of the Chang River.

From the north to the south of the river, several ships, like giant beasts in the night, slowly crossed the wide river. No lights could be seen on the ships, and it was only when you got close could you make out the huge dark shadows.

Ship after ship docked.

Countless soldiers, wearing thick black armors that only occasionally glowed with a star of cold light in the night, noiselessly disembarked from the ship. Gradually, thousands upon thousands of soldiers gathered on the bank of the river.

The horde was such yet they weren’t noticed in the slightest.

The General leading the army naturally knew what was going on.

Li Sheng sat on his war horse and quietly looked south.

He knew from the letter that Wei Kai sent him long ago. He said that Lou Yue bribed the guards here, and none of them would appear in the area today. Hence, the soldiers under his command were now in full control of this river bank.

In addition, there was also a person he had been ordered to kill.

The more than 10,000 soldiers behind him were nothing more than just bait to lure that Lord into his urn. Naturally, these soldiers didn’t know anything, and they all came to avenge General Huo.

Only he and the dozens of elites who have long been lurking around knew that tonight, he came to kill General Huo and eliminate future troubles for His Highness.

He waited in silence.

Just then, a voice came from a forest in the distance.

“Li Sheng?”

It came from far away, and it was Huo Wujiu's voice.

In a shot, the densely packed officers and soldiers behind him perked up, spilling muffled noises. Li Sheng coldly glanced back, and saw dozens of soldiers around him, all poised and waiting there.

He smiled coldly.

No matter how prestigious Huo Wujiu was, he would be trampled into bloody mud by the horses' hooves today. The soldiers behind him also would never dare to speak out. After all, the Crown Prince was his backer.

Li Sheng withdrew his gaze and raised his voice: "General, it is the last General!"

As he spoke, he stealthily waved his hand, signaling the soldiers around him to prepare.

When his words fell, a subtle noise from the forest resounded before long.

A tall man galloped out of the forest on his horse at full speed toward Li Sheng.

Li Sheng raised his hand.

The next moment, dozens of arrows, like falcons, broke through the air, suddenly tearing the silence of the night, and swooped down on that silhouette.

The man on the horse could not dodge at all. Several arrows hit him out of the blue, and he fell heavily to the ground with the war horse whining.

Li Sheng's eyes lit up.

It's done.

The officers and soldiers in formation were dumbfounded and froze in place. The dozens of soldiers around Li Sheng, on the other hand, tightly protected him in the middle.

Li Sheng raised the scroll in his hand.

“By the imperial decree, this General has come to kill the rebels!” He declared, “Huo Wujiu, the traitor General, has already taken refuge in Southern Jing! If he isn’t killed, he will become the seed of future danger!”

The scroll glowed with a faint golden light under the night.

The surrounding soldiers were struck by lightning. No one knew what the change of events tonight was all about, but the imperial decree was in Li Sheng’s hand. They might be ignorant of the truth, but they did not believe that Li Sheng would dare to fake the imperial decree and kill Huo Wujiu in such a grand manner.

For a spell, the soldiers in the formation remained motionless. Only that one man and his horse crashed on the open wasteland in vain.

When Li Sheng saw this, he put away the scroll with satisfaction. He rode his horse under the escort of the elites around him and headed for the corpse.

As long as Huo Wujiu was confirmed to be dead, his mission would be complete.

After tonight, His Highness the Crown Prince would no longer have to toss and turn and lose his appetite because Huo Wujiu was still alive, let alone be coerced by Pang Shao because he was in his hands.

Everything would be settled.

He couldn’t help but show the pleasure of a great event coming to fruition on his face, that is, until he got closer and had the torch lit by the soldier next to him to see Huo Wujiu’s dead face.

The torch illuminated the corpse.

On the ground, however, was only a dead horse.

And on top of the horse’s back was actually a straw man.

The next moment, a sharp arrow whizzed through the air and nailed into Li Sheng’s throat. The accuracy of the arrow head was so steady and powerful that it penetrated his neck bone.

At once, blood splashed everywhere. His eyes widened, and he didn’t even have the time to erase the smile in the corners of his mouth.

Between a silvery light that appeared suddenly, he saw Huo Wujiu riding on his horse at the edge of the woods with a cold expression.

And his hand that drew the bow was still in place.

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Chapter 151

The next moment, Huo Wujiu put away the bow, extracted the horsewhip at his waist and swung it in the air.

With a crisp whip, the sound of horses' hooves was heard in the darkness.

The resounding hooves drew nearer. The soldiers who galloped out of the darkness on horsebacks then surrounded the elites in the crowd who were scattered in a panic. Anyone who dared to move their weapons to resist was immediately beheaded and unseated from their horses. After a spell of sword clashes, the soldiers who emerged from the darkness neatly captured those people.

Huo Wujiu rode his horse and charged toward the Great River.

The night was hazy, and without the moon, the surroundings appeared even darker.

A few months ago, he also led his army across the river on such a night. But as a result, the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and horses that were supposed to cross the river with him did not move, leaving him with only a few soldiers and besieged by Southern Jing's defending troops.

That was the first time in his life that he had lost a battle.

He suspected that the strategy he formulated was too aggressive, or perhaps his deployment had been flawed. He had always been confident and somewhat conceited, and at that time, he also racked his brains to take the blame for those mistakes. Unbeknownst to him…

It was the Huo family's army who stabbed him in the back.

He charged forward, stopped in front of Li Sheng's body, lowered his head, and surveyed Li Sheng in the dim light of the night.

His death was miserably ugly. Li Sheng's eyes were wide open, and his blood had stained several square feet of ground around him.

Huo Wujiu, however, looked at him as if he were an animal that had been shot to death, without any ripples in his eyes.

"General…" Wei Kai called with some concern behind him.

But Huo Wujiu withdrew his gaze, still without any expression on his face.

"Go and order the troops." He said. "See how many men and horses Li Sheng has brought as bait."

Wei Kai knew that he was suffering, and he felt even more distressed to see Huo Wujiu acting as if nothing had happened.

He pursed his lips and said in a low voice, "Understood."

He turned his horse around and had just taken two steps when he heard Huo Wujiu say, "Anyone who dares to resist even the slightest, kill."

Wei Kai snuffled and again answered under his breath, "Got it."

As soon as he drifted away, Ji Hongcheng's soldiers escorted the captives forward. The dead were many, and only a few were now left alive.

Huo Wujiu sat on his horse, lowered his eyes, looked at the few people who were kneeling on the ground, and calmly asked, "Who instructed Li Sheng to do so?"

One of them struggled to raise his head.

A tall man was sitting upright on a tall horse, carrying a bow and arrows on his back, and a whip in his hand, which he idly flung, emitting a subtle lashing noise.

The whip clearly did not fall on him, but it gave him the creeps.

This was the first time the man saw Huo Wujiu face to face.

Since he joined the army, he had been under the command of General Huo Yuyan, in other words, the Crown Prince. Compared to the powerful and invincible Huo Wujiu, His Highness was gentle and cautious. He always thought twice about using the army, consolidating at every step.

Since the day Huo Wujiu took over all the troops under his father's command, they had been living in Huo Wujiu's shadow.

The people said that Huo Wujiu was the God of War who could fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat, but who noticed how hard His Highness thought and toiled for them all night till dawn?

However, it was fine back then. When marching to war, what mattered was life and victory or defeat, not these. But now, the Great Liang had established the state, and the current emperor was also the one who was enthroned. Hence, if His Highness were to live in the shadow of a military general, there would be endless trouble ahead.

Tonight, these people, who knew of the truth, were the ones that the Crown Prince mostly relied upon and trusted.

They must not do anything to betray him.

The man looked at Huo Wujiu, clenched his teeth and said nothing.

But Huo Wujiu continued calmly, "Did Huo Yuyan order him to do it?"

On the side, a soldier immediately shouted, "No! His Highness doesn't know anything. General Li has been jealous of you for a long time and wants to get rid of you!"

Huo Wujiu answered with a chilly laughter.

"Jealous of me? Get rid of me?" He looked like he had heard some kind of joke. "Who is he, and how can he be worthy?"

As he spoke, he clasped the reins with one hand, and the horse obediently took two steps forward.

“Without Huo Yuyan’s will, he dared to falsely convey an imperial edict, dared to bring troops across the river to kill me? There is no need for you to play dumb with me here. I already know the answer. Today, I just want to hear your confessions before you die.”

The horse paced slowly in front of the crowd.

The eyes of one of them gradually turned red when he heard him speak so blatantly.

He could hardly retain his composure and snapped, “Since General knows, why are you still dragging out your ignoble existence! If you really cared for the good of the Great Liang and truly considered His Highness as your own brother, you should have killed yourself earlier to put his mind at ease. Why did you let him give the order personally?! You’re so proud of your achievements. Do you really think that the Great Liang can’t do without you?! On the contrary, as long as you are alive, His Majesty and His Highness will never sleep in peace!”

The horse that was pacing gently came to a halt.

Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes and looked straight at him.

The man probably didn’t know Huo Wujiu’s words just now were just to swindle them.

… Unexpectedly, he not only deceived them to spill the truth, but also swindled out such… a statement that was so novel to him.

Ji Hongcheng on the sidelines couldn’t bear to listen any longer.

When the bird is gone, the bow is no longer needed; all generals knew exactly how things stood more or less. However… without Huo Wujiu, who else had the ability to beat the rich and prosperous Jing Dynasty into its feeble existence today? It should be noted that the Jing Dynasty might have

been ruled by a decrepit and dimwitted Emperor ten years ago, but the foundation left by the former Emperor was still far from being destroyed.

And yet they dreaded Huo Wujiu, were anxious to have him killed… that was his biological uncle and his elder cousin whom he trusted with his heart.

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Chapter 152

“General Huo…” Hearing no response from Huo Wujiu for a long time, Ji Hongcheng nervously stepped forward and called him.

But Huo Wujiu raised the hand holding the whip and motioned him to be silent.

Ji Hongcheng shut his mouth.

Then through the bleakness of the night, he saw Huo Wujiu slowly smile.

There was nothing unusual about it. It just bore a hint of indescribable bitterness and irony.

“Well said,” he commented.

After saying that, his expression turned cold. He pulled on the reins with one hand, kicked, and spurred his horse away toward the Great River.

“Kill all captives.”

——

That night, waves surged forth in the Great River.

Huo Wujiu commanded the ten thousand soldiers by the riverbank and even swaggered outrageously. He ordered Wei Kai to immediately carry Li Sheng’s head, lead people across the river, and commanded him to send all the officers and men guarding Jiangbei (the north of the river) to Jiangnan (the south of the river) overnight.

The naval ships cruised to and fro all night long.

Meanwhile, above the river, an inconspicuous gray pigeon flew across the river and arrived at Lin’an city at the fourth watch.

When the sky brightened, two messenger horses pulled an inconspicuous carriage, quickly merged into the fading night, rolled on the empty, blue-brick street stained with morning dew, and stopped outside Tianshu Gate. There, they handed an urgent letter through the locked palace gate.

A few moments later, a corner door opened at the Tianshu Gate. One of the men on the carriage hurriedly got off and entered without delay. With a heavy thud, the corner door closed, and the entire magnificent imperial city became an iron prison that no bird could fly into.

Only the carriage remained, quietly parked outside the Tianshu Gate.

——

The palace gates were locked every day at certain hours. If officials wanted to enter the palace at night, they could have a chance to be granted an audience at night only if they had an extremely urgent memorial in their hands, which they could pass through the Tianshu Gate, the nearest gate to the Emperor’s residence.

This was the first time that the Hou Zhu was awakened from the night due to an urgent missive since he ascended the throne. He was led to the imperial throne in his robes and sat back there, still dozing off.

He was up late last night with the two newest concubines in the palace, and had just fallen asleep.

A few moments later, he saw Pang Shao who entered at a brisk pace.

With a thud, he knelt down in front of the cherished throne.

“I had concealed an extremely important matter from Your Majesty, and now that it has come to light, it is my fault!” he started.

The Hou Zhu was totally confused. He held back the yawn that had reached his mouth and asked, “What is it?”

“Huo Wujiu has escaped.” Pang Shao gritted his teeth and said. “I have been in contact with Huo Yuyan, the Crown Prince of Northern Liang, and his men sent an urgent missive today, saying that Huo Wujiu has led Northern Liang’s troops across the river. I’m afraid there are a hundred thousand of them.”

The Hou Zhu’s brows furrowed tightly.

He understood every word Pang Shao said, but together they made him confused.

What was this all about? How could so many things suddenly happen in one night?

Then Pang Shao took out several letters he had prepared with Huo Yuyan’s correspondence, laid them on the Hou Zhu’s desk and quickly explained everything to him.

“Before Huo Wujiu crossed the river, Huo Yuyan found this minister. He wanted Huo Wujiu’s life, but did not dare to do it himself, so he said he would trick Huo Wujiu into coming and wanted to kill him through this minister’s hand. This minister wanted to kill Huo Wujiu, but temporarily changed my mind. I wanted to capture him alive just to restrain Huo Yuyan —— After all, this minister could always send Huo Wujiu back intact any time and threaten the Crown Prince’s position again. Therefore, as long as Huo Wujiu is in the Great Jing, Huo Yuyan will dare not act rashly.”

The Hou Zhu, however, still looked groggy. He asked, “Is this what you told me, that keeping Huo Wujiu alive was useful?”

Pang Shao felt vexed looking at his dull and wimpy appearance.

If it wasn’t an emergency and he needed to take his decree to mobilize the army from the surrounding counties, Pang Shao wouldn’t have come here to report this to this bastard. Everything he said was six parts true and four parts false. He would never tell the Hou Zhu he had been relying on Huo Wujiu to suck a steady stream of tens of thousands of silver from Huo Yuyan in recent months.

Pang Shao gritted his teeth and replied, “Yes. But now, Huo Wujiu escaped, which will endanger Lin’an again. This minister asks for Your Majesty’s imperial decree to immediately send people to the surrounding counties to borrow soldiers and horses to protect Your Majesty’s safety.”

The Hou Zhu was then half awakened with fright.

“Go. Go then quickly.” He asked, “But how did Huo Wujiu escape?”

Pang Shao gnashed his teeth.

“Jingwang set him free,” he answered, “It takes three to five days to get to the river from Lin’an. So many days have passed, yet Jingwang Manor remained peaceful. It must be a cover for Huo Wujiu.”

When he said this, Pang Shao clasped his fist and knelt down and said, “Your Majesty, you must capture and guard Jingwang. Since he provided cover for Huo Wujiu, this minister believes that he has quite a lot of information about Huo Wujiu in his hands. Perhaps, we might even have a chance of pinning Huo Wujiu down after his arrest.”

The Hou Zhu couldn’t care less about this.

“That sick boy is bold enough to collaborate with the enemy!” He gnashed his teeth. “Sure enough, the wicked son of a lowly concubine is rotten to the core!”

After cursing, he raised his hand and ordered, “Someone! Go to Jingwang Manor and bring that bitch for me!”

However, Pang Shao stopped him, “Your Majesty, no!”

The Hou Zhu scowled, “What?”

Pang Shao said, “Jingwang is unfathomable, so this minister is afraid this will inadvertently alert the enemy. I have a plan. Please listen to it, Your Majesty.”

The Hou Zhu said, “Make it quick.”

Pang Shao elaborated, “There will be a Grand Court Assembly today, so Your Majesty might as well wait until he enters the palace and then let him stay behind. By then, he will be in the palace. Won’t that like be catching a rat in the hole?”

When the Hou Zhu heard his argument, he thought it was reasonable.

He breathed a sigh of relief and said, “Let’s do as you say.”

Pang Shao responded and moved to retreat.

The Hou Zhu’s drowsiness was swept away, and he watched Pang Shao bow and retreat. Outside the window, the faint morning light penetrated inside, blending with the light of the candles in the hall.

The Hou Zhu suddenly spoke.

“Uncle,” he called out.

Pang Shao stopped.

Then he heard the Hou Zhu ask, “No matter what, Uncle will stay in the capital and protect me, right?”

Pang Shao bowed his head and saluted. He couldn’t see his face clearly under his wide sleeve and high crown.

“I will do so myself, and will never abandon Your Majesty.”

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Chapter 153

Early the next morning, Jiang Suizhou got into the carriage and went straight to the palace to attend the Grand Court Assembly.

He did not sleep well the night before. He didn’t fall asleep until the second watch, and got up again at dawn.

Still, he had to attend the Grand Court Assembly.

If he claimed to be sick and didn’t go, the palace would definitely send the imperial doctors to diagnose and treat him. Huo Wujiu’s presence in his courtyard was a matter of public knowledge. If outsiders entered the residence, everything would be exposed if they spotted some clues.

He could only bite the bullet and get into the carriage.

The rocky carriage ride made him dizzy. When he got off at the Kaiyang Gate, the early morning sunlight made him dizzy again.

He frowned and gathered up his robe and walked towards the palace.

According to the approximate speed, Huo Wujiu should have reached Nan’an in the Chang River in the past two days. But Jiang Suizhou hadn’t received any news, so he had no idea if things were progressing well on Huo Wujiu’s side…

He walked all the way through the vast white marble square in Kaiyang Gate and entered the Guangyuan Palace Hall.

He came very early, but Pang Shao, who was always late, was already waiting in the hall. Several officials around him were chatting nearby, but he seemed to be lacking in interest, as if something else was on his mind.

Jiang Suizhou raised an eyebrow. He could guess what it was.

Pang Shao is acting abnormally. He must have done or is about to do something evil. I wonder if I can hear any clues at the court session later. If not, I must ask Xu Du to investigate again…

He was thinking to himself when he noticed Pang Shao looking at him.

It was a fleeting glance, which swept past him, but that gloomy and cold gaze sent forth an unfathomable meaning that left Jiang Suizhou with goosebumps.

He withdrew his gaze, and an ominous premonition sprouted within him.

Could it be that he had already sniffed out Huo Wujiu's affairs? But why was there no movement in the manor, and none of his people came to investigate?

Jiang Suizhou glanced at Pang Shao, then turned around and looked out of the hall.

Strict imperial guards were stationed around several palace gates, while ministers scattered in the square full of daylight were slowly approaching the Guangyuan Palace Hall.

Presently, he had entered the palace, and naturally he could not leave before the court assembly was over. He would have to wait for a while until the morning court session ended. He needed to go back as soon as possible to see what had happened.

In half a tea's time, the ministers had already arrived and were waiting quietly in the hall. If they were to consider the Hou Zhu's habit, they would wait for at least another quarter of an hour before he would arrive late.

But just then, a eunuch's voice rang out.

The ministers knelt down to pay their respects, and then the Hou Zhu sat on the imperial throne.

The uneasiness in Jiang Suizhou's heart grew stronger.

When unusual things happened, something had to be amiss, not to mention that Pang Shao and the Hou Zhu were acting oddly today.

Jiang Suizhou forced down the uneasiness down, but his mind kept straying back to Huo Wujiu.

Although these two people were acting strangely, they were safe and predictable. They weren't worth worrying at all. Could it be that Huo Wujiu was unlucky and was exposed? Jiang Suizhou knew he shouldn't mistrust Huo Wujiu like this, but he couldn't help but be concerned.

Unease gnawed at his heart, but he finally made it through the court session.

He reluctantly breathed a sigh of relief and bowed along with the civil and military officials. Seeing that many courtiers were already withdrawing, he turned around as well and joined them.

But at that moment, the Hou Zhu on the throne spoke.

"Fifth Brother," he called, "Wait for a moment."

The expression on his face was as usual, but Jiang Suizhou inexplicably felt uneasy. After a brief contemplation, he took advantage of his ghastly pale complexion due to lack of sleep, coughed a few times, and said with a hoarse voice and forced smile, "Imperial Brother… I've just suffered from a cold these last two days, so I am afraid of passing my illness to you. I'd better rush back home to take medicine."

However, the Hou Zhu moved and leaned forward on his throne.

"We have some important matters to discuss," he said. "This matter needs to be done by you. No one else can."

Jiang Suizhou's eyebrows twitched invisibly, but he asked, "I wonder what the matter the Imperial Brother is talking about?"

The Hou Zhu surveyed him meaningfully for a spell.

“In a month or so, it will be the death anniversary of our Imperial Father.” He looked cold, quietly looking at Jiang Suizhou. His tone also sounded stiff. “I want the Ministry of Rites to hold a memorial ceremony for our Imperial Father’s death anniversary. Fifth Brother, Imperial Father only has two sons left now, you and I. Are you unwilling to perform these things?”

Jiang Suizhou coughed. At this time, his face was dreadfully pale and flushed abnormally. His complexion was quite sickly.

But he was quickly weighing things deep inside.

The biggest rift between the Hou Zhu and the original owner was probably due to the partiality of the former emperor. Because of this, the Hou Zhu treated him indifferently, but also insisted on keeping him. Did Pang Shao somehow persuade him?

No wonder Pang Shao’s expression this morning was so strange.

It made sense to think so.

But Jiang Suizhou still had doubts in his heart. He hesitated and glanced at the Hou Zhu, then turned around and looked outside the hall.

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Chapter 154

After the court session, officials were not allowed to stay in the palace without an imperial edict. Presently, the court officials have already dispersed. Far away in front of the palace gates were guards and eunuchs, who were closing the doors.

Jiang Suizhou was alarmed.

How could the palace gates be locked in broad daylight?!

However, he heard Jiang Shunheng's cold sneer behind him.

"Does Fifth Brother want to disobey the edict?" he questioned. "Forget it. Someone, please invite His Highness Jingwang in."

Three or four stalwart guards immediately stepped forward and blocked Jiang Suizhou's escape.

The old eunuch standing behind Jiang Shunheng slowly stepped down with a smile and bowed in front of Jiang Suizhou.

"Your Highness, this way."

The eunuch looked up at him with an unfathomable smile.

Jiang Suizhou's heart flinched. The uneasiness he'd been feeling was instantly confirmed.

At this moment, he had already fallen into an inescapable snare alone.

——

Lou Yue left the palace and just arrived at the entrance of his house when he saw Lou Wanjun waiting anxiously at the door.

“Father!” She greeted him.

Lou Yue quickly asked, “What’s the matter?”

Lou Wanjun stuffed a note into his hand.

“Huo Wujiu has sent news.” She said, “It came from a messenger horse just now.”

Lou Yue hurriedly unfolded the note.

There he saw exquisite calligraphy with iron hooks and silver fonts, Huo Wujiu’s handwriting.

“The matter’s done; can return in three days. Quickly surround Lin’an, and do not let Pang Shao escape. Changes can occur in the city at any time, so be sure to protect Jiang Suizhou.”

The last few words were written with extreme solemnity.

Lou Yue took a deep breath.

“It’s done,” he said. He was about to enter the house quickly, but Lou Wanjun grabbed his arm and asked, “Where’s Jingwang? Huo Wujiu already told you to pick him up sooner. It’s safer to bring him directly to the army.”

Lou Yue nodded and replied, “You’re right. As your father, I must go outside the city to deploy troops first. You immediately send someone to Jingwang Manor to pick Jingwang first.”

Lou Wanjun agreed, turned around and went to the gatehouse to get her horse.

However, at the same moment, fine sounds came from the eaves of the gatehouse. Lou Wanjun looked up and saw a silhouette of a man, darting up

from a deep alley nearby, and with a sharp dive, landed in front of her.

“Who is it?!” She was startled.

However, the man didn’t stay in front of her at all. Instead, he rushed with lengthy strides and pulled Lou Yue, who was in a hurry to leave the city.

As soon as Lou Yue turned his head, he recognized the man. He was one of Huo Wujiu’s men who stayed in the capital.

“General Lou, there is a change in the palace,” he reported.

Lou Yue’s eyebrows tightened. “What?”

The man anxiously replied, “The palace gates have been locked, but His Highness Jingwang has not come out.”

Lou Yue was startled, turned around and rushed outside the city.

Lou Wanjun hurriedly stepped forward and intercepted him.

“Where are you going, Father?!” she asked.

Lou Yue quickly replied “Where else can I go?! There are still soldiers outside the palace. If we enter the city at this time to save him, we may still be able to catch up!”

As he spoke, he couldn’t help but whisper and blame himself, “It’s my fault for leaving so early. I should have waited for Jingwang!”

Lou Wanjun was equally anxious that her eyebrows were wrinkled.

“Is it faster for you to lead the troops into the city to save him, or faster for His Majesty to kill him?” she said sharply.

Lou Yue stopped in place.

“Then what should I do?” He was on tenterhooks.

Heard Lou Wanjun ask the informer, “Did Pang Shao come out earlier?”

The man answered, “He came out earlier.”

Lou Wanjun clenched her teeth.

“Father,” she said, “Then now, he can only be exchanged.”

With that sentence, she pulled a horse out of the gatehouse and galloped away.

“Go to the outside of the city and blockade Lin’an immediately. I will go to Pang Shao’s residence and see if I can capture him alive.” She said, “Even if we can’t swap them, we’ll both have a hostage in hand, so His Majesty won’t dare to kill him so easily.”

——

Missives after missives were sent to the palace.

Pang Shao’s men hurried away with the imperial edict after the Grand Court Assembly. Unexpectedly, before they could leave the city, they were intercepted.

The ones who cut them off were none other than the soldiers under Lou Yue’s command.

The more than 40000 army blocked all the eight gates of Lin’an City. For a time, all the people and officials in the city were besieged inside. Even a bird could no longer get in nor out of Lin’an.

Lou Yue was rebelling.

The Hou Zhu was so furious that his body trembled, feeling insulted that the insolent bastard actually learned to rebel. He couldn’t think of a way out, and immediately sent people to the Chief Minister’s house, asking them to invite him to discuss countermeasures.

To his surprise, the Chief Minister’s residence was empty. Pang Shao was nowhere to be found.

The only people left in the manor were a bunch of servants and a few unfavored concubines and their children. Pang Shao himself, along with his young son and wife, were missing.

Pang Shao took advantage of the chaos of the city being besieged and had already fled.

The Hou Zhu was waiting uptight in the throne room for Pang Shao to relieve him. Unexpectedly…

He sat on the imperial throne and listened to the report of the palace guards, who had just returned. For a moment, he did not make a sound.

After a long time, he hoarsely mumbled.

“Uncle must have gone to bring people to rescue me.” He said, “That’s right. What use are the people in the city now? Only by looking for an army outside can we relieve our troubles.”

No one around him dared to make a sound.

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Chapter 155

A moment later, the eunuch at his side could not help but speak up, “Your Majesty…”

Hearing this, the Hou Zhu took a deep breath.

“Dai-ban (literally means Great Companion),” he started, “But my uncle promised to stay in the city to protect me at all times. Why would he go back on his word?”

The eunuch beside him couldn’t come up with a response.

Then he heard the Hou Zhu laugh.

“I will wait.” He said, “Uncle will not fail to return. What’s more, didn’t that old thief Lou Yue only block the city gates? He didn’t make any other movements, right? I don’t believe he will dare to bring troops into the imperial city and kill me. I will just wait–wait for my uncle to return and save me.”

After saying that, he stood up without greeting anyone, and walked away.

He had just taken two steps forward when he stumbled and almost fell, clinging onto a pillar carved with a golden dragon nearby.

“Your Majesty!” The surrounding eunuchs rushed to his aid.

“Your Majesty, don’t worry! Lou Yue’s rebellion must be aimed at the Chief Minister; he won’t really do anything to Your Majesty…” the old eunuch comforted him.

However, the Hou Zhu snapped, “Shut up.”

The old eunuch was immediately silenced.

The Hou Zhu's eyes drooped.

He initially thought that when he was on the throne after that wicked concubine and his eccentric father were dead, he would no longer stand alone and be left alone like he used to be, especially when his uncle treated him so well.

Yet, he did not expect that he would be abandoned by his uncle one day.

"Your Majesty…" the old eunuch said tremblingly.

Hearing this, the Hou Zhu took a deep breath.

"Is Jiang Suizhou already locked up in the dungeon?" he asked.

The old eunuch promptly replied, "Yes."

The Hou Zhu laughed.

"Then go." He said, "I still have to discuss business with my brother."

——

When Jiang Suizhou left the hall, those guards tied him up.

He had already anticipated what circumstances he would face.

Those people were really superfluous. Considering his feeble physique, was there a need for him to be tied up so? Even if he was not tied up, he would not be able to escape.

But… he was kind of relieved as well.

The Hou Zhu was driven to such lengths to capture him, meaning Huo Wujiu didn't fall into their hands. Things must have succeeded, too, so they could only detain himself.

That being the case… at least Huo Wujiu is safe.

He was pushed and shoved all the way to a remote part of the palace. He entered a simple and solemn palace courtyard, and then was taken into an underground cell.

There seemed to be no living person in the cell, but the dampness mixed with the stench of decay and blood was pungent.

The smell was all too familiar, like the smell of Huo Wujiu's body when he first met him that day.

This dungeon must be where the worst felons were held in the palace.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but inwardly let out a bitter laugh.

The Hou Zhu really thought highly of himself.

The guards opened the cell door, threw him inside, locked the door and left. Jiang Suizhou crashed on the wet and rotten straw and felt pain all over his body. He gasped for breath, then began to survey how bad his surroundings were.

It was gloomy and rotten, with dark red blood stains on the straw and walls.

Jiang Suizhou had heard that no one who entered this dungeon survived more than three days. After all these years, the only exception was Huo Wujiu. There was no one else except him.

Jiang Suizhou lowered his eyes and sighed.

He had no chance of becoming a special case, considering his feeble body, which struggled to walk a few steps.

At this point, on the other hand, he actually calmed down quite a bit and didn't have much fear.

He thought he was afraid of death, but to his surprise, he wasn't at all afraid even when one of his feet was already inside the ghost gate. On the

contrary, he felt glad that the things he was worrying about in the courtroom did not happen.

Huo Wujiu is safe. That's good.

After all, he was just a sickly prince who was recorded in history with a few strokes, while Huo Huo Wujiu was a treasure treasured by historians.

After all… he would rather be locked up than let Huo Huo Wujiu suffer the least bit.

He sighed.

It was just a pity, though.

It was a pity that perhaps in death, he would only be the one who knew his feelings.

He closed his eyes.

Time passed unknowingly, then disordered footsteps sounded outside the dungeon. He opened his eyes and realized that someone had come to open the cell door. Once the door was opened, before anyone else could enter, two young eunuchs hurriedly moved a chair into the cell, and then retreated.

He saw a black hem embroidered with a golden dragon.

It was the Hou Zhu.

He looked up and saw the bloated fat man wrapped in his imperial robes, stepping into the cell expressionlessly and sitting down on that chair. Many eunuchs and guards followed in, so for a while, the narrow cell bustled with activity.

However, even after everyone came in, Pang Shao's figure was nowhere to be seen.

Jiang Suizhou looked at the Hou Zhu, and found that he was also looking at him.

For a spell, two pairs of eyes faced each other, and both exuded cool detachment.

The Hou Zhu leaned back in his chair.

“Someone,” he ordered lazily, “Hang him up first for me.”

Jiang Suizhou vaguely had an inkling.

From the Hou Zhu’s appearance, it was clear he was not here to interrogate him.

Rather, it was more like he had come to vent his anger.

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Chapter 156

The guards acted roughly.

They dragged Jiang Suizhou up from the ground, and then pulled down a rope from the beam. Jiang Suizhou was in severe pain, and the pain immediately awakened his chaotic consciousness a bit.

Where did Pang Shao go?

Now that there was only the Huo Zhu left here while Pang Shao was nowhere to be found, this meant there were two possibilities—either Pang Shao had learned of Huo Wujiu's plans and movements and went to capture him, or the major event was about to be completed and Pang Shao had escaped.

Jiang Suizhou groaned, raised his eyes, and looked at the Hou Zhu.

The guards had already brought the torture tools out.

He clenched his teeth, forcing himself to be sober and calm, and then let out a cool laugh: "Imperial Brother, you really think highly of this sick brother."

The Hou Zhu looked him straight in the eye.

He glared at Jiang Suizhou, and his eyes were overflowing with hatred that could not be concealed. His expression was also a little distorted, causing the fat on his cheeks to jiggle.

After a while, he said bitterly, "Jiang Suizhou, are you very proud?"

He gritted his teeth and spoke coldly. At first glance, he was forced to a dead end, and that made him loathe him.

With this appearance, Jiang Suizhou could presume that they had 1 to 2% chances of winning against the Hou Zhu and Pang Shao's party.

Jiang Suizhou closed his eyes and exhaled quietly.

Wonderful. This way, he had nothing to worry about.

Jiang Shunheng had fallen to such a state and had no way to survive. However, since both sides were at the end of their ropes, and the Hou Zhu had lost a right arm like Pang Shao, then he could try to gamble.

… He would just have to hope that the Hou Zhu in front of him still had extravagant hopes and affection for his uncle.

He closed his eyes and said slowly, "Where shall we start, Imperial Brother?"

"Start what?" An eerie laughter escaped from the Hou Zhu's throat as he stood up from his chair. "Why? Didn't you wait for this day when you deliberately set Huo Wujiu free?"

Jiang Suizhou laughed faintly in response.

"That's not quite true." He said, "It's just that Huo Wujiu has promised me some benefits, and we both get what we want."

"Both get what you want?" It was as if the Hou Zhu had heard some kind of joke.

Then, he gritted his teeth and said, "If each takes what he needs, would he have left you behind to stay here, waiting for me to kill you?"

For some reason, he spit the words 'left behind' quite heavily, as if containing some hatred and grievances that he could not express verbally.

Still Jiang Suizhou laughed calmly.

“For sure.” He said, “I also have his handle in my hand. That thing is what Pang Shao wants most. Pang Shao won’t kill me.”

As he said that, he acted a little puzzled. He looked around and asked, “Where is Pang Shao?”

Seeing his reaction, the Hou Zhu frowned in confusion.

“He’s gone,” he replied, “What about it?”

When Jiang Suizhou heard his response, he acted surprised. His calmness just now completely disappeared.

“Impossible!” He said, “If Pang Shao fails to obtain that thing, he will never give up, so how can he leave?”

The frown on the Hou Zhu’s face deepened, but in the bottom of his heart, he felt a wave of relief.

He thought to himself: *Sure enough. My uncle has just personally gone to bring me help. He didn’t leave me behind and flee.*

… Even if not for him, it would be for the object in Jiang Suizhou’s hand, wouldn’t it?

After listening, he paused for a second and asked, “What is it?”

Jiang Suizhou remained silent.

The Hou Zhu was a little impatient.

His uncle was always like this. He didn’t tell him anything until it was the last resort. He would only tell him that he had arranged everything. Although he was happy to be free, sometimes he would be a little upset. He felt excluded, like an outsider.

His uncle acted so, but on what basis could Jingwang, a sickly son born to a wicked concubine, act so?

The Hou Zhu was displeased. At this point, he no longer cared to restrain himself. He took several steps forward and immediately landed a kick on Jiang Suizhou.

Although he had been indulging in lust for many years and had long been hollowed out without much strength, his bloated frame was still there. With a kick filled with all his strength, he succeeded in earning a muffled grunt from Jiang Suizhou. He was hoisted up and was kicked into a stumble.

“I’m asking you a question,” the Hou Zhu said.

Jiang Suizhou, however, raised his eyes and looked at him provocatively.

“If you are so capable, you can beat me to death today.” He said, “That way, when Pang Shao returns with an army, everything he wants will be rotten in this brother’s stomach.”

The Hou Zhu stared daggers at him.

Jiang Suizhou was truly repulsive as hell, and just the sight of him could bring back unpleasant memories. However, he had always been restrained, always avoiding his spearhead, and had always submitted meekly to his insults, maltreatment and humiliation.

This was the first time Jiang Suizhou had showed such arrogance in front of him.

He loathed him so much that he wished he could watch this man suffer more than a dozen kinds of torture in the cell, cutting him to pieces one at a time.

But… he couldn’t.

He observed Jiang Suizhou in front of him.

This sickly young man was only hung up in this gloomy prison for a moment, yet his face and lips were already pale. This good-for-nothing could die at any moment. Even when this trash was suffering at this time, he did not dare to really gamble…

No matter how much resentment he harbored, he didn’t want his uncle to come back to a corpse and be disappointed.

After all, his uncle didn’t leave him behind, did he? His mother was still in the palace, and she was his uncle’s most beloved sister from childhood. Jiang Suizhou even had something that his uncle wanted. With these factors in the play, his uncle would not abandon him…

He even unintentionally, like an isolated child, held out all his valuable treasures, just in exchange for someone to consider him more.

The Hou Zhu stared intently at Jiang Suizhou with his eyes glowing red and his hands shaking.

He wanted to kill this man, but could not.

After a while, as if his emotions finally went out of control, he grabbed the salt-soaked whip from the guard next to him, and swung it heavily on Jiang Suizhou.

The sudden whip fell on Jiang Suizhou and immediately ripped Jiang Suizhou’s court robes apart. Even if the Hou Zhu was weak, the whip still left a bloodstain when it landed on his body.

Jiang Suizhou’s eyebrows tightened. Even though he clenched teeth, a painful grunt still escaped from his lips.

His reaction greatly pleased the Hou Zhu.

He stared at the blood that instantly seeped out of Jiang Suizhou’s robe, and a twisted smile surfaced on his face. He gritted his teeth and swung the whip once more at Jiang Suizhou.

The sound of flesh being lashed resounded loudly in the cell, and a bloody stench gradually diffused, mixing with the rotten blood in the prison.

Even if he wouldn’t kill Jiang Suizhou, he would make him suffer a lot.

If his father were watching in the heavens, let him open his eyes and have a good look. His self-righteous favor to this good-for-nothing would be the death of him.

———

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Chapter 157

Fortunately, Lou Yue was fast in deploying his troops. In half an hour, the whole of Lin’an was tightly surrounded.

Amidst the chaos, he even detained Pang Shao’s carriage. Although Pang Shao brought a lot of dead soldiers and subordinates with excellent martial arts skills, a lot of his henchmen still died against him. Finally, he detained Pang Shao, together with his wife and young son, and locked them up securely.

Presently, Lou Wanjun, who had missed her target, returned without delay.

“And now, we need to send a message to the palace,” Lou Yue frowned and said.

Lou Wanjun stood beside him with her arms crossed. When she heard this, she kicked Pang Shao, who was tied tightly beside her.

“What’s so hard about it?” she said. “Just cut one of his fingers and send it to the palace. Won’t His Majesty understand everything?”

Lou Yue gritted his teeth.

“Aren’t you afraid that he will cut a finger of His Highness Jingwang as well?” he retorted angrily.

Lou Wanjun frowned: “Then what should we do?”

Lou Yue surveyed the few people bundled in the barracks. After a moment, he glanced at Pang Shao’s five-year-old young son who was wailing and crying, and Pang Shao’s wife next to him.

“Write a letter and teach someone how to deliver it at the entrance of the palace along with the letter and this young son of his.” Lou Yue instructed, “Just say that what I did today was all because Pang Shao has taken over my army of 300,000 in Lingnan, and I want an explanation. Pang Shao, his wife, and son are now in my hands. As long as someone brings back the head of the rebel general in Lingnan, I will let him go. But Jingwang is my benefactor. If Jingwang dies, I don’t mind killing Pang Shao this time.”

Lou Wanjun quickly responded, picked up Pang Shao’s young son with one hand, and turned to leave.

However, she heard Lou Yue shout at her again.

“Don’t forget to tell him that Pang Shao has already spoken about Huo Wujiu.” He added, “Let him rest assured that as long as the 300,000 troops are returned to the rightful owner, he can hand Huo Wujiu to me. There’s no need for His Majesty to worry about it.”

As expected, within half a day, someone threw out a letter between the cracks of the city gate.

It was a handwritten letter from the Hou Zhu.

The handwriting was all scribbles, showing how irritated the person who wrote the letter was.

“Rest assured that Jiang Suizhou is still alive. Quickly send a number of people to south to deploy the army. Bring the heads of whomever you want, but the army must be transferred without delay.”

Lou Yue finally breathed a sigh of relief.

He had successfully tricked the Hou Zhu. This way, Jiang Suizhou would be temporarily safe in the palace.

However, a day later, his nerves tensed up again.

The new magistrate of Suzhou was a member of Pang Shao’s party. Because the city was very close to Lin’an, he immediately sent a message

to Pang Wei in Lingnan and also led 30,000 soldiers from Suzhou. They escorted him to the north. In the evening of the next day, the Suzhou soldiers arrived.

Lou Yue and his party were guarding the city gates at this time. Nobody could infiltrate the city, yet an enemy army arrived outside the city. For a time, Lou Yue was unable to take care of himself. With several generals under his command, each guarded a place and defended against the reinforcements from Suzhou.

Fortunately, one side guarded the city gates, while the other side was cautious and trying to explore. The leader of the army was a civil servant who had never fought a war. He never got to touch within an inch of the city gates all day, and Lou Wanjun even chased a troop twenty miles away.

But that night, a scout delivered news.

When Pang Wei in Lingnan heard that Lin'an was under siege and his father was captured, he gathered 300,000 soldiers overnight and marched to Lin'an.

The distance between Lingnan and Lin'an was short, and the advance troops would be able to arrive at most three days.

Lou Yue led his generals to get together and calculate to determine whether Pang Wei would arrive faster than Huo Wujiu. As a result, everyone's hearts sank to the bottom. After their discussion, no one said a word and, instead, quietly returned to the gates where they were guarding. They just have to wait for a few more days with their negligible number as support until Huo Wujiu's reinforcements arrived.

Such a gloomy pressure permeated outside the city for the entire day.

This lasted until the next day.

Early in the morning, the sunrise broke through the sky, shining brightly on the ancient and dull city walls.

The general guarding the northern part of the city had not slept all night. His heartstrings had been high strung the entire time, so he was a little bleary-eyed. He stood on the city wall and was about to go down for some breakfast when he heard a sudden cry of alarm from the soldier standing guard beside him.

“General!” he exclaimed, “Someone’s coming!”

The general was startled and promptly looked toward a distance as far as the eye could see.

Then he saw dust rising on the distant horizon, trodden out by soldiers and horses. A mighty army, with no end in sight, was approaching Lin’an City.

It had only been two days since they learned that Pang Wei had moved. He was quite swift!

General instructed double quick, “Go, go inform General Lou! They’re here!”

The soldier answered promptly. But after running a few steps, he then turned back and asked, “General, who is here?”

The general wished he could kick him in the face.

“Who else could they be? Can you get here from the Chang River so fast?!”

After saying that, he looked in the direction of the city outside.

With just one glance, he froze.

He was guarding the northern city gate… This seemed to be facing the Chang River.

As for the soldiers and horses that were getting closer, the man at the lead did resemble Huo Wujiu.

——

The general stumbled and ran all the way down from the city wall, straight to the outside of the city to welcome the mighty army, and then met up with Huo Wujiu who came galloping on horseback.

The cavalry behind him alone was tens of thousands, but the rest of the army had to be ten times more than that.

How could this be!

The general was so excited that he almost broke into tears.

The Chang River was so far away from here, and he was leading an army from Jiangbei (south of the river) to the north. How could they be so fast? But the one on the black horse at the lead was indeed Huo Wujiu.

In a blink, Huo Wujiu raised his hand, and the cavalry behind him stopped on the spot. He rushed to the general with his whip, pulled the reins with one hand, and stopped the war horse in place.

The war horse raised its front hooves and stopped.

The general knelt on one knee in excitement and cupped his fist towards Huo Wujiu, “General Huo!”

Huo Wujiu gave him a hum, and with a tug on the reins, he marched towards the city gate.

“I didn’t expect the General to be so swift. We were so worried!”

The general quickly chased after him.

However, Huo Wujiu glanced back at him, answered lightly, and then asked, “Where is Jingwang?”

The general was stunned, wondering what General Huo wanted with Jingwang.

“His Highness Jingwang is in the palace, no?” he answered.

Huo Wujiu’s grip tightened, and the warhorse hissed and stopped in place.

General Huo turned his head.

He remained expressionless, but his eyes instantly turned cold, so sinister that the tall general couldn’t help but shiver.

“Say what?”

Huo Wujiu’s voice was squeezed out in between his clenched teeth.

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Chapter 158

The general shuddered when he heard his question.

General Lou made no order, ah! It turned out that General Hou was unaware of this!

The general was at a loss for words. He stammered for a while and finally stuttered a reply, “I mean, a few days ago, His Majesty asked Jingwang to stay behind in the palace, and then there was no more…”

Before he could finish speaking, Huo Wujiu’s low, icy voice interrupted him.

“A few days ago?”

The general didn’t dare to speak again.

Then Huo Wujiu also remained silent.

After a while, he clenched his teeth and looked down at the general, whose knees turned jelly by the terrifying look on his face.

“What good things did Lou Yue do?” he said.

His tone was still calm, but his voice was squeezed out from his teeth. That forcibly suppressed gloomy appearance heralding a tempest was even more frightening than when he was furious.

The general hurriedly floundered to explain: “General Lou was also left with no other choice! His Majesty somehow got information and especially arranged to take the Prince away after the court session…”

Huo Wujiu gripped the whip in one hand and raised the other, signaling the general to shut up.

The general instantly zipped his mouth.

He watched as Huo Wujiu led his horse with one hand. He turned sideways and around towards the back. The generals who were leading the army behind him immediately took their orders, and then the well-trained troops divided themselves into several wings and staged formations outside the city.

Huo Wujiu returned his attention to the general at his side.

“Tell Lou Yue to quickly burn incense and send prayers to Buddha. If anything happens to Jingwang, he won’t survive either.” His voice was glacial, speaking through clenched teeth.

“Go open the city gates,” he commanded.

——

After that day, the Hou Zhu spent two days in the palace in the world of wine and women.

However, his spending and drinking was now very different from before. He acted so perverse to the point of madness, so the people around him did not dare to persuade him. They only carried out his orders and daily informed him of the situation outside the city. Afterward, he would go to the dungeon to check if Jingwang was still breathing.

His Majesty beat him up quite badly that day.

His Majesty had never beaten anyone in his life. After that day, Jingwang, who was let down from the rope, was passed out, almost black and blue from head to toe. With his orders, the people who worked these days also gave him medicine and food every day. Jingwang might have been dizzy when he woke up, but he was hanging on for dear life and never died.

This lasted until this morning. The guard who went to the city gate to scout for news rushed back to the palace and dashed to the Hou Zhu's bedchamber.

"Your Majesty, it's terrible. Your Majesty!" The guard urged urgently, "The rebel, Huo Wujiu, has led an army outside the city! Your Majesty, you should pack up and escape from the palace!"

The Hou Zhu, however, replied, "Isn't Lou Yue there?"

The guard was so anxious that he almost jumped. "Your Majesty, General Lou is probably lying to you! The spies at the city gate said that Huo Wujiu's soldiers are all lined up outside the city. However, the soldiers under Lou Yue have not moved at all. Obviously, they are in cahoots!"

The Hou Zhu was holding a wine cup, looking at the swirling wine inside. After a while, he calmly opened his mouth and asked, "Did Lou Yue betray me too?"

The guard's voice trembled with anxiety: "It's too late to discuss this now, Your Majesty! Nothing is as important as your life! While there's life, there's hope. It's not too late to behead these rebellious ministers later!"

All at the same time, the servants in the palace huddled together, knelt down, and begged the Hou Zhu to escape. Even the two concubines, who were leaning against his arms, were shivering all over in fright. Their fear weakened them to their knees and they couldn't care less about fixing their dresses.

At this hour, if the army of the Northern Liang really were to invade the royal city, they were unlikely to survive whether His Majesty lived or died.

The Hou Zhu's eyes were hazy. He sat there, looking at the gilded palace, full of kneeling people.

They were knocking their heads on the ground, and all he could only see were the tops of their heads. But although the palace was full of people, he felt as if he was alone in the entire world.

That’s right, although he lied to himself that his uncle went out of the city just to deploy the rescue army, who would bring his wife and children along to deploy a rescue army? He might have thought that Lou Yue was his final defense, but Lou Yue also ended up lying to him.

Everyone had given up on him.

From the time his father abandoned him like a piece of junk, he was forever a piece of trash that no one wanted.

The Hou Zhu gripped his glass of wine and rose to his feet, laughing at himself.

——

Jiang Suizhou spent the past few days in chaos.

Fortunately, those people believed him and did not dare to let him die easily. Whenever he woke up, he forced himself to eat something and hang on to that breath.

Nonetheless, there was real pain in his body.

He hadn’t been beaten since he was a child, let alone a beating that could have killed him. He was so numb with pain, and felt as if the pain was like scorching fire. It pricked his head down to the tips of his nerves.

He couldn’t fathom how Huo Wujiu spent a month down in this cell.

He was always unconscious, and he didn’t know exactly how long he had been there. Until this day, he barely had some consciousness, only to feel that the surroundings were blindingly bright. A heavy fragrance lingered at the tip of his nose, which was completely inconsistent from the dungeon he was in.

He opened his eyes hazily and felt the blinding golden light around him.

Where am I?

Jiang Suizhou moved and realized that his hands were tied behind him. He was actually sitting on a chair. It was soft underneath him, but the back of the chair was making his wounds sting.

Just then, he heard a voice.

“Are you awake?”

It was the Hou Zhu.

Jiang Suizhou reluctantly adapted to the blinding light around him, and slowly opened his eyes, then he found himself sitting in the resplendent palace.

This was the main hall of the Hou Zhu’s bedchamber. Under his seat was a wide imperial throne.

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Chapter 159

In front of him was an imperial desk that had been pushed to the ground, with memorials and books scattered all over the place. At the foot of the steps not far in front of him was the Hou Zhu, who was sitting on the heavy carpet with his legs crossed and an imperial robe, which was draped recklessly over his body, in disarray. In one of his hands was a jar of wine.

Jiang Suizhou frowned at him, not knowing what he was up to.

However, the Hou Zhu asked him with a smile and a tipsy tone, “What do you think? Is my throne comfortable to sit on?”

Jiang Suizhou’s voice was hoarse, and his breath sounded weak: “What are you up to?”

After hearing his question, the Hou Zhu smiled and said, “I’m not going to do anything. I just don’t want to die. There are still a good deal of things that I haven’t seen, so I can’t die.”

With that response, he tried to stand up with one hand on the ground, but tripped over his robe and crashed heavily on the ground again.

He didn’t mind it either.

“In any case, I want to see you die.” He said. “Huo Wujiu is also to blame. He ruined my kingdom, so I also want to watch him die.”

After saying that, he laughed.

“You don’t believe me, do you?” The Hou Zhu said smugly, “I can’t kill him, but someone can kill him for me.”

Jiang Suizhou asked hoarsely, “Who?”

After the Hou Zhu crossed his legs, he took a sip of wine comfortably.

“His brother, ah,” he answered with a smile. “If it weren’t for his brother, do you think you’d have the good fortune of marrying him?”

Jiang Suizhou flinched. His brain, which was clogged by pain, sobered up in an instant.

“…What did you say?” he asked after.

He was in such a hurry that he choked and coughed. The cough tugged at his wounds, and the pain made his vision spin. He almost fainted.

The Hou Zhu was too drunk to see what was wrong with him. He only propped himself up on the ground with one hand and wobbled to his feet.

He glanced at Jiang Suizhou.

His elegant court robe had been torn, and now stained with old and fresh blood. His hair was scattered on his shoulders, and his ashen face was also stained with blood, making him look wretched.

Nevertheless, he was born beautiful. Although his half-dead appearance looked wretched, he still exuded an indescribable and wicked beauty, like an orchid that was stepped on in the blood mud.

The Hou Zhu grinned in satisfaction.

He held the jar with one hand, while the other hand haphazardly lifted the hem of his imperial robe. He staggered up the red steps to the throne, and with his robe pinched, he squatted down in front of the desk that was scattered in front of Jiang Suizhou.

“You can’t believe it either, right?” He rummaged around in the pile of messy scrolls on the floor and finally picked out a few sheets of paper, which he waved in front of Jiang Suizhou.

“See this?” He started, “They’re secret letters. The Crown Prince, Huo Wujiu’s brother, sold him to my uncle a long time ago.”

After informing him of that, he sat on his butt and shook the pieces of paper with an accompanying chortle.

“By virtue of him being Huo Wujiu, the God of War of the Liang Dynasty, right? What’s the use? His father died, and even his brother betrayed him.” He chuckled. “All people are like that, not just me.

But Jiang Suizhou couldn’t care less what he said.

He only stared at the pieces of paper.

What did he just say? So, it was Huo Wujiu’s brother who betrayed him? Huo Wujiu only had that one brother, Huo Yuyan.

In a blink, Jiang Suizhou’s mind cleared up, and all his doubts before seemed to have an explanation.

Huo Wujiu’s sudden defeat in war; his hesitation to proceed; even when his legs were already healed, he didn’t readily return to the north. Huo Yuyan, who died early in history books, and Huo Wujiu, who guarded Yangguan alone until his death…

It turned out that the instigator of everything was Huo Yuyan!

Jiang Suizhou’s breath caught, and he struggled on the imperial throne.

But his limbs were tied, so no matter how much he struggled, it was all in vain.

Jiang Shunheng gently opened his hand and tossed the pieces of paper back to the ground.

“Everyone is like this,” he said with a smile. He raised his head, picked up the empty jar, and poured whatever was left into his mouth again.

Jiang Suizhou, however, suddenly struggled hard, tearing the wounds on his body. He was in such pain that he lurched to the side and bumped straight onto the armrest of the golden throne.

His mind went blank in pain.

But the next moment, he suddenly came back to his senses.

Imperial throne!

Although he didn't know why the Hou Zhu had tied him here, he was definitely going to die today. As far as his eye could see, there were only the two of them left in the hall, so he must find even a slim chance of survival for himself.

He clenched his teeth, holding back the taste of blood that rose up in his throat. He sat up straighter and turned sideways.

His hands, which were bound behind him by ropes, were right by the angular golden dragon on the back of the chair.

He gritted his teeth, stuck the rope on the golden dragon, and grinded it hard.

He moved stealthily, and the Hou Zhu was too drunk to notice everything for a while. He leaned sideways against the red-painted pillar beside him.

"However, I hate you the most." He said, "The day your wicked concubine mother gave birth to you, she should have thought of today. When father spoiled you beyond the skies, he should also have thought of a day like today."

Speaking of this, he shook his head.

"However, you and I can put our grudges behind us today."

Jiang Suizhou gathered whatever strength he had left on his pair of arms. At this time, he merely pursed lips and did not dare to speak, fearing that he'd reveal the slightest cue.

But fortunately, the Hou Zhu wasn’t waiting for his response.

He stretched his legs and said: “Today, if you die here, it would be a huge favor to me. I promise, after today, I will not hate you anymore.”

After speaking, he guffawed drunkenly.

Just then, a eunuch’s panicked cry sounded outside the hall : “Your Majesty, it’s ready. Your Majesty, please follow this servant!”

The Hou Zhu impatiently responded. He propped himself up on the ground, and slowly stood up.

“When you get to the underworld, don’t hate me.” He said to Jiang Suizhou. “Only hate our Imperial Father. He favored you too much and drove me into wanting to kill you.”

After he finished speaking, he stumbled down the steps, and before leaving the palace gate, he turned around and grinned at him.

The next moment, he raised his hand and nudged a golden candlestick that was lit beside him.

The flames roared to life.

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Chapter 160

With the flames soaring, the Hou Zhu swaggered off.

Jiang Suizhou grit his teeth and cursed under his breath.

Who gave this dog emperor this horrible idea?! How dare he burn him to death in his bedchamber! Was he going to pass it off as an accident?

Jiang Suizhou turned sideways and ruthlessly severed the rope around his hand using the imperial throne.

Fortunately, they came up with such a method. They didn’t let him die immediately; they even gave him a chance to save himself.

However, the palace was covered in silk and fur. The fire raged quickly and spread out in a blink, forming a sea of fire. The thick smoke rose and made Jiang Suizhou cough non-stop, but he didn’t dare to relax. He clenched his teeth and rubbed the rope on his wrist earnestly.

His wrists were scratched and swollen, while sweat dripped from his forehead. The sweat that dripped on his wounds stung badly, let alone the other wounds on his body, which had reopened due to his vigorous movements. In fact, they were torn and bleeding again.

Jiang Suizhou was shaking all over.

His eyes were blurred from the pain and exhaustion. The only sound left around him was the crackling of the flames, which gradually blazed stronger.

He rubbed the rope back and forth mechanically, no longer able to feel the tension and pain.

The flames spread around the palace, engulfing the embroidered extravagant curtains in all four corners. In no time, the blazing red and red gold vividly intertwined, gradually swallowing the entire palace into a sheet of flames.

He didn’t know how long it took, but he heard a fine snap.

The rope broke. Jiang Suizhou also lost all his strength and collapsed on the throne.

The solid and painful impact finally sobered him up.

It’s done.

Tears unconsciously welled up in his eyes. He got up agonizingly, and without considering anything else, he bent down to untie the rope on his legs. He began to shake uncontrollably. After several attempts, he finally untied the rope.

He stumbled to his feet. While supporting himself with one hand on the throne, he surveyed his surroundings through blurred vision.

Right at this time, fire was blazing everywhere, and flames tightly sealed the main door. Only a small door on the east side, which had just been ignited by the fire, still had some space for him to escape.

Jiang Suizhou ran straight there.

But after taking a couple of steps, he stopped and turned around.

He looked at the imperial desk that crashed to the ground. At this time, the fire hadn’t reached it yet, including the memorials and books that were scattered all over the place.

The letters!

Jiang Suizhou acted without a second thought and turned around. His legs couldn’t support him, so he almost fell on the pile of books.

He desperately rummaged through the documents there.

Those letters from Huo Yuyan must not be burned. Those were the only evidence that could tell Huo Wujiu the truth about his defeat, to tell him that the summer tree behind him was not his fortress, but a tiger’s lair.

This was evidence that Huo Yuyan had harmed him.

Jiang Suizhou’s hands were trembling. He obviously had lost all his strength due to pain, weakness and fatigue, but he drew a boost of energy somewhere somehow. He searched quickly, and soon found the thin pieces of papers scattered on the ground.

By the light of the fire, he read the words on top, and then tucked them tightly into his arms.

He propped himself up on the throne and stumbled to his feet.

But when he looked at that corner door again, it was already surrounded by flames. The wooden structure could not withstand the fire, and after a series of crackles, it crashed and fell into a field of flames.

He had no way out anymore.

Jiang Suizhou braced himself to keep from falling down. However, upon surveying his surroundings once more, he realized that he had no way out.

He clung to the desk, and when he finally couldn’t hold on, he fell to the ground.

He raised his hand and wiped his face. At some point, he shed two drops of tears that trickled down and hung on his chin, cutting a sorry figure of himself.

He thought to himself, Did I just come here for nothing?

The next time he opened his eyes, he didn’t know if he’d already be in the netherworld or back at his desk, facing the ridiculous thesis written by that student.

He also had no idea what would become of this history because of him… As for Huo Wujiu, how would he be different from the original?

His only regret was not seeing the evidence in his arms handed over to Huo Wujiu.

… Perhaps he was feeling a tinge of resentment, too. Before death, he didn’t get to see Huo Wujiu one last time.

This was the first time in his two lives that he felt what love was, and also the first time he felt what unrequited love was.

He closed his eyes.

He instantly relaxed. The adrenaline rush that was overdrawn earlier began to demand his life. He just felt dizzy, and every inch of his body was screaming pain. However, he was so drained that he could barely keep his eyes open…

Just then, a resounding crash echoed.

He glanced up and saw that the beam in front of the palace was finally consumed by the flames and collapsed. It shattered a large part of the roof, revealing the clear blue sky amidst the flames.

Next, it was above his head.

Jiang Suizhou looked at the sky, and after a moment, closed his eyes tiredly.

——

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Chapter 161

When Huo Wujiu arrived at the Emperor’s bedchamber, what he saw was a sea of fire.

He had killed his way into the palace, and his iron armor was soaked with blood.

Alongside him were officers and soldiers who were anxiously trying to put out the fire, but no water source could be found. Next to him, the man who had long been escorted to kneel on the ground, was none other than the drunk and disheveled Emperor Jiang.

Huo Wujiu sprinted forward.

The soldier beside him quickly reported, “General! This dog emperor said that His Highness Jingwang is over there!”

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes only to see an ocean of fire that blasted his eyes red.

“It’s already starting to collapse, General. How can this…”

Before the soldier could finish speaking, cries of alarm burst around him.

All that the soldiers saw was a scarlet cloak whistling by. Their General stepped on the white marble steps, rushed forward, leaped onto the roof and landed into the raging fire.

“General!”

Alarmed exclamations erupted in all directions, and the other generals panicked.

Then they heard the Emperor, who was slumped on the ground, laughing heartily.

“Bravo,” he applauded. “Today I was able to burn them both to death with one fire. What a harvest!”

The soldier beside him was red-eyed and drew his sword to kill him, but was stopped by his fellow soldiers around him.

“Don’t be impulsive!” The man next to him said sharply. “Don’t kill prisoners without the General’s orders!”

The soldier said with red eyes, “But General is…”

Just then, a loud boom came.

The crowd looked up and saw the lofty Emperor’s chambers collapsing in a sea of fire.

The Emperor cackled even more unrestrainedly.

“Come on!” He laughed. “Kill me and avenge your General!”

But at the same moment, his laughter came to an abrupt halt.

The smile also froze on his face.

When he raised his head, he discovered that Huo Wujiu, who was soaked in blood from head to toe, was carrying a man wrapped in tattered robes. He stepped on the roof that was about to collapse and leaped across the palace the second the bedchamber collapsed.

The fluttering cloak behind him was already sizzling with fire. The scarlet cloak burned with fine embers, and sparks burst up, blending with the color of the cloak.

“The General has escaped!”

The officers and soldiers let out a chorus of cries.

Huo Wujiu landed steadily and extinguished the fire on his cloak with a flick of his frame.

He knelt on one knee and embraced the man cautiously yet firmly in his arms.

Immediately, some soldiers greeted him. However, they heard Huo Wujiu's muffled voice ordering them in a deep voice, "Go find a doctor, hurry up."

The crowd did not dare to delay and quickly dispersed.

Huo Wujiu knelt on the white marble brick floor in front of the burning ruins. He bent forward, hugging Jiang Suizhou with one hand, and gently caressing his cheek with the back of his other hand.

He wanted to wake him up, but was also afraid of hurting him.

"Jiang Suizhou," he hoarsely whispered, "Suizhou, open your eyes for a moment."

Wei Kai, who then arrived with his troops, saw this scene and stopped on his tracks, not daring to step forward.

He saw the charred burnt marks on the General's cloak, and saw that the General's scarlet eyes were all wet. He was kneeling on the ground and was apparently uninjured, but like a fierce beast that had been shot in his vitals, curled on the ground and lingering on with his last breath.

Wei Kai's eyes also reddened.

But at that moment, a faint noise sounded from Huo Wujiu's arms.

It was the sound of Jiang Suizhou coughing.

Wei Kai took a step forward, but stopped in his tracks and stood rooted on the ground.

Jiang Suizhou coughed a few times. His eyelashes fluttered, and he weakly opened his eyes.

“Jiang Suizhou!” Huo Wu Jiu’s hands trembled as he hugged him.

However, Jiang Suizhou coughed and struggled to raise his hand.

“How are you feeling? Where do you hurt? Don’t be afraid. The doctor will be here soon,” Huo Wujiu anxiously said with his hoarse voice.

But Jiang Suizhou raised his hand and placed it on his chest.

“Here.” His voice trembled, and his voice could barely be heard over the crackling flames.

“What? Are you wounded here?” Huo Wujiu panicked and hurriedly reached out to touch the spot.

However, Jiang Suizhou laboriously pulled out a few pages of paper from his lapel.

The pages were stained with mottled blood that all seeped out from Jiang Suizhou.

Huo Wujiu took the sheets, just gave them a passing glance, and then put them away.

“Don’t you know what’s happening now? Who cares about these?!”

He growled at Jiang Suizhou under his breath. He sounded quite fierce, but as his voice exited, his tears fell.

The two round and moist tears fell on the sheets of paper.

Jiang Suizhou strenuously tried to smile, but he could barely curl the corners of his mouth.

In the end, he raised his hand with all his strength, and touched Huo Wujiu’s face weakly. His tone sounded sapped, as if leaving his last words.

“Because I didn’t dare to tell you,” he said.

“I like you. This is the only thing I can do for you.”

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Chapter 162

Jiang Suizhou’s voice was so weak with almost only a breath left. In fact, his eyes closed before he could finish speaking.

The blue veins on the back of Huo Wujiu’s hand bulged, and his lips began to quiver.

He couldn’t tell what he was feeling right now.

He finally heard the words he’d been dreaming of all these days, the words he didn’t even dare to think about. However, those words gripped his heart tight, clutching the fragile organ in pieces. It hurt so much that he stopped breathing.

He couldn’t utter a word. All he could do was raise a shaking hand to check Jiang Suizhou’s breathing.

It was so faint that he could hardly feel it, but Huo Wujiu felt the fragile but stable breath in the blazing heat wave nearby.

It was as if he had finally found a life-saving straw in a hopeless situation. It might have been a whisper of a breath, but it was enough to stabilize his rapidly falling heart.

Huo Wujiu voice sounded low and hoarse with an indistinct tremor. He told Jiang Suizhou, “It’s all right. Everything will be fine. Don’t worry. No one can make anything happen to you.”

His tone sounded tense. He was clearly speaking to Jiang Suizhou, but the fluster and dread that could not be hidden in his voice were clearly trying to persuade himself.

After speaking, he looked around and saw a soldier trotting all the way and dragging the staggering imperial doctor through the palace gates.

Huo Wujiu hugged Jiang Suizhou in his arms and stood up. He turned to Wei Kai and said, “Have the doctor follow.”

The look on his face was still as solemn and calm as ever, as if he was deliberately hiding his panic, but his red and teary eyes could not be concealed.

Wei Kai immediately responded. He turned around and went to meet them. Huo Wujiu carried Jiang Suizhou up and turned around, then went straight to an intact palace room nearby.

After taking several steps, he stopped and glanced at the Hou Zhu next to him.

The Hou Zhu was slumped on his knees and was already limp. His face was flushed due to wine, but his gaze was straight and brimming with sinister hatred. He was glaring at Jiang Suizhou in Huo Wujiu’s arms.

Huo Wujiu lowered his eyes and gave him a glance, then turned around and left.

“Tie him up tightly and throw him into the fire,” he ordered.

——

A commotion erupted outside the windows.

The moment the army entered the imperial city, they seized all the courtesans and concubines up and down the palace. At this moment, Huo Wujiu’s soldiers filled the outside. The Hou Zhu was already dead, and everyone was busy putting out the fire.

The atmosphere inside the palace room, however, was tense.

The doctor’s hand was shivering as he checked Jiang Suizhou’s pulse.

Currently, soldiers in heavy armor were strictly stationed all around. The General standing beside the bed, whose armor was still stained with blood, was staring at him with cold eyes.

Huo Wujiu gave off the impression that if the person on the bed was in the slightest danger, he would immediately snap his head off.

He was quite capable of it.

The Imperial Doctor knew that this man had just led an army into the Imperial City and killed the Emperor.

After taking Jiang Shuizhou's pulse, the doctor finally breathed a sigh of relief. He plopped on his knees and bowed in front of Huo Wujiu's feet.

"General, rest assured!" He said, "Although His Highness was tortured, his injuries are not too serious. He just lost a little too much blood. In addition, his body is weak, and he's mentally exhausted. Coupled with overexertion earlier, he passed out. I will prescribe medicine for His Highness, and then treat his wounds. By then, His Highness Jingwang will wake up!"

A subtle hum sounded.

Huo Wujiu, who was standing there with his strings stretched too taut, suddenly let out a pent up breath and experienced a momentary loss of strength. He swayed and leaned against the bedpost.

"Is he all right?" Huo Wujiu asked.

The imperial doctor nodded repeatedly: "It's really nothing serious! General, just rest assured!"

Hearing that, Huo Wujiu released a slow sigh of relief.

"Go fetch the medicine," he said. "Wei Kai, quickly go to Jingwang Manor and get Li Changning here."

Wei Kai answered and hurriedly went out.

Huo Wujiu leaned against the bedpost and looked down at Jiang Suizhou.

His torn court robe was stained with blood. His hair was scattered on the pillow, soiling the bedding and pillow with the smell of blood. Even the few strands of messy hair on his cheeks were stained with blood.

His complexion was so pale, making the bloody smudges quite dazzling.

Hence, when the Imperial Doctor came back with his medical kit, he saw such a scene.

The stern General earlier was now half-crouching and half-kneeling at the side of the bed, carefully brushing the hair on the cheeks of His Highness Jingwang on the bed.

The strength of his hand was entirely light, and there was even trembling perhaps due to extreme caution.

The Imperial Doctor hastily lowered his eyes and turned a blind eye to it.

Simultaneously, a soldier outside rushed in.

It was Ji Hongcheng.

“General!” He rushed inside with a couple of strides and said. “General Lou told this subordinate to report that Pang Wei has brought his army and is almost outside the city!”

Huo Wujiu’s hand that landed on the side of Jiang Suizhou’s face paused slightly.

After that, he asked, “How many has he brought?”

Ji Hongcheng replied, “The headcount at present is uncertain, but at least say a hundred thousand! But looking at their formation, I think Pang Wei must have come in a hurry. The numbers are less than 300,000!”

Huo Wujiu stayed silent for a moment.

He wanted to stay in the room and keep an eye on the Imperial Doctor as he treated Jiang Suizhou, until the latter woke up.

But he also did not forget that if not for Pang Shao and Pang Wei's dangerous plans, he would not have been forced to leave Lin'an, nor would he have left Jiang Suizhou alone in the city, allowing Pang Shao and Jiang Shunheng to find a loophole.

This grudge must be avenged.

He carefully caressed Jiang Suizhou's cheek with his knuckles, then propped himself up on the edge of the bed with one hand and stood up.

"I'll be there right away," he replied.

Ji Hongcheng happily hummed in response, and turned around to lead the way.

But then he heard Huo Wujiuu say, "You stay."

Ji Hongcheng was stunned. He turned around and asked, "Do you have any other orders, General?"

Looking at Huo Wujiu's serious and indifferent posture, Ji Hongcheng thought: Could it be that there were still remnants of the enemy forces in the city that have not been wiped out? Or perhaps were there still some unstable factors in Lin'an city, which could impede their success?

Against all odds, Huo Wujiu turned his head and looked at the doctor who was carrying his medical kit at the door.

"Watch him," he commanded. "Let him treat Jingwang well, and if he dares to do anything, kill him."

——

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Chapter 163

Jiang Suizhou regained his consciousness in a blur.

At first, he vaguely felt some changes in his body. It was a refreshing feeling that he was deprived of for a few days in a row, back when he felt filthy from blood stains. Then, the smell of medicine lingered around the tip of his nose. It was bitter, but also mixed with a bloody smell.

His eyelashes fluttered, and light seeped in between his eyelids.

He frowned, and heard a subtle noise right next to him.

Someone seemed to be guarding him beside the bed. At this moment, the person propped up at the edge of the bed and leaned forward.

He moved his eyelids and laboriously opened his eyes.

Almost in an instant, the light of the candles around him blinded his eyes. He closed his eyes again, but immediately, he heard a familiar but hoarse voice.

“Are you awake?”

It was Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou’s muddled consciousness cleared up a bit. He again struggled to open his eyes and saw Huo Wujiu, who was guarding the bedside amidst the brilliant candle flames and cascading canopy.

“You…”

Jiang Suizhou was about to speak when discomfort struck his throat. He immediately coughed. His coughing tugged at him and made his body ache all over again. He gasped for breath in between coughs.

Huo Wujiu next to him immediately panicked.

He panicked, wanting to smooth his breath, but was also afraid of hurting him. Hence, he held him in his arms for a while. He stiffened, not daring to move.

“Li Changning!” Huo Wujiu raised his voice anxiously.

The sound of panicked footsteps approaching from afar sounded shortly. Li Changning rushed in and checked Jiang Suizhou’s pulse, and then examined his wounds.

“General, don’t worry. It’s nothing serious.” Li Changning said, “It’s just that he choked on smoke in the fire. He only has to take two doses of medicine and recuperate well for several days, then he’ll be fine.”

Huo Wujiu was relieved and said, “That’s good. Is there still medicine decocted on the stove? You should go back and watch it.”

Li Changning responded and withdrew.

After a coughing fit, Jiang Suizhou’s consciousness and memory gradually came back.

He remembered the drunk Hou Zhu and the burning flames of the palace hall. In his exhaustion, he only managed to retrieve the evidence of Huo Yuyan’s betrayal of Huo Wujiu, and then collapsed by the throne, watching the roof being burnt down by the flames.

His memory afterward was fuzzy, as if an illusion.

Amidst the crackling flames, he seemed to have heard Huo Wujiu’s voice calling him. Then, he fell into an embrace that was quite familiar. It was Huo Wujiu.

At that time, he only thought that God heard his dying obsession, so he conceived such an illusion.

But now it seemed… everything might be real.

Looking back on what he could remember last, he seemed to have made a last struggle to take out those pages of evidence from his arms, and then said to Huo Wujiu…

When Jiang Suizhou recalled this, his heart throbbed in fright.

He actually relied on his short life span and told Huo Wujiu what he had hidden in his heart.

When his coughing gradually stopped, he cautiously glanced at Huo Wujiu.

He realized that Huo Wujiu didn't have time to change his clothes. He was wearing thick black armor and was covered with dark red blood which was dried up now.

He had turned away and was pouring tea at the table. As soon as he turned around, Jiang Suizhou saw the badly burnt red cloak behind him. He must not have noticed it, and no one dared to remind him to change it.

Just then, Huo Wujiu turned back around.

Jiang Suizhou panicked. He wanted to close his eyes quickly, and pretend that he hadn't woken up at all.

But it was already too late. Huo Wujiu supported him to sit up. Due to his injuries, he was too slow in moving, so it was too late to lie down. In just one breath, Huo Wujiu had already turned back, holding a cup of warm to his lips.

"Moisten your throat first." Huo Wujiu said. "Li Changning's medicine will be ready in a moment."

Jiang Suizhou reached out to take it, but Huo Wujiu held his wrist and forcefully shoved it back under the covers.

“Don’t move around,” Huo Wujiu ordered.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t resist him, so he just drank a few mouthfuls of water with butterflies in his stomach.

Huo Wujiu probably never even thought of it, right? Jiang Suizhou actually went back on his word. He told him that he was no cut sleeve, but then after a while, he said he liked him. Straight men had always been disgusted with this sort of issue, so he had no idea if Huo Wujiu was being nice to him because of the evidence he had found for him.

Jiang Suizhou mulled over it for a while until the tea in the cup had bottomed out.

Huo Wujiu took the teacup away, and Jiang Suizhou promptly opened his lips, trying to find a topic that wouldn’t embarrass him.

“Where are Pang Shao and Jiang Shunheng?” he asked.

Huo Wujiu turned to put the teacup away while saying, “Jiang Shunheng was burned to death, and Pang Shao is imprisoned for the time being.”

“Then Pang Wei…”

“He lost his mind because of his father’s capture that he brought a hundred thousand cavalry. They arrived this morning and were captured at dusk. He tricked those soldiers into thinking that they were entering the capital to rescue the Emperor, only to find out that it was General Lou who beat them. They naturally refused to do so, so it didn’t take me much effort,” Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou breathed a sigh of relief: “That’s good, then…”

But Huo Wujiu turned around and asked, “Didn’t you hear what Li Changning said just now? You’ve just woken up. Why do you have so much to say?”

It was clearly a ferocious question, but Huo Wujiu’s tone sounded inexplicably soft. He was clearly admonishing him, but why did it sound a

bit loving?

Jiang Suizhou merely considered it an illusion and shut his mouth in embarrassment.

In Huo Wu Jiu's eyes, his expression was full of grievances.

All he felt was his heart melting into a puddle of spring water.

He turned around and walked to the bed. He squatted down on one knee in front of the bed, exactly at eye level with Jiang Suizhou.

"Since you want to talk, why don't I do the asking?" Huo Wujiu looked at him and said.

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

Huo Wujiu stared at him for a moment, then reached out his hand. His knuckles touched the side of his face and gently stroked it.

"Then let me ask you, do you still remember what you told me today?"

The look on that face was serious, but deep in those eyes, there was nothing but an entirely gentle smile.

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Chapter 164

Jiang Suizhou's heart skipped a beat when he heard the words, and then his mind went blank.

For a spell, he panicked. He opened his mouth, but did not utter a single word.

After a long time, he explained somewhat flustered, "No, I was just…"

He realized that Huo Wujiu was smiling and staring straight at him.

"I see," he said. "So merely in a moment of desperation, you told the truth."

"I…"

Jiang Suizhou was about to speak when Huo Wujiu interrupted him.

He stretched his hand into Jiang Suizhou's blanket and took his hand underneath the blanket.

Huo Wujiu certainly held his wrists a lot, but in the past, he had held them through a sleeve. This time, however, Huo Wujiu directly covered the back of Jiang Suizhou's hand, clasping his entire hand into his palm.

Jiang Suizhou was rather stunned.

Gradually, his consciousness returned, and only then did he react to what Huo Wujiu's action meant.

Huo Wujiu's palm was quite rough. At a glance, he could tell that they were traces left by years of martial arts practice. The hand was not as calm as its owner's expression. On the contrary, it was tightly clenched, as if the owner

could not find an outlet to vent his surging emotions. His grip painfully shook his finger bones.

After that, Huo Wujiu thought it wasn't enough, so he pulled his hand out of the quilt, wrapped his other hand around it, and held his hand tightly in his hands.

Jiang Suizhou stared at him blankly.

Going by his reaction, could it be that he was also…

In that instant, the look in Huo Wujiu's eyes, his smile, and even his inexplicable displeasure at times finally had an explanation.

Jiang Suizhou felt as if he was hallucinating.

No way in hell… how could someone like him also silently like him in that way…?

The impact of this response was so strong that he forgot to celebrate for a while.

Meanwhile, Huo Wujiu, who was kneeling by the bed, pulled his hand forward and pressed it to his face.

"Why didn't you get desperate earlier?" His tone was very low, as if talking to himself. At once, he revealed a trace of foolishness. As soon as he said these words, he immediately overturned his question, and then muttered to himself, "No, blame me for wanting you to say it first."

Speaking of which, he abruptly frowned and said, "But I didn't notice it at all."

Jiang Suizhou whispered an answer, "… I did not notice anything either."

Huo Wujiu didn't even think about it and reasoned rightfully, "Of course, I can't let you notice anything. You have told me that you are not a cut sleeve. What if you caught wind of it and were scared away? I couldn't tie you back by then."

“Of course, I’m not.” Jiang Suizhou blurted out. “I just…”

It was just that when he reached this point, he realized what he was saying. He shut his mouth in time and swallowed back all the words that followed.

It was really strange. In order to prevent Pang Shao’s suspicions before, what unpleasant words did he not say in front of the crowd? He had always been calm and relaxed, and could even act flamboyantly. But now, he couldn’t express even the simplest heartfelt words.

Though his hand that Huo Wujiu was holding felt heart, his heart was burning even hotter.

But Huo Wujiu, in front of him, seemed to have understood it.

He looked at Jiang Suizhou with searing eyes, and laughed for a moment.

His laughter was so pleasant to the ears, that it brought a dull tremor in Jiang Suizhou’s chest, and it spread inch by inch to his hand.

Then, Huo Wujiu seemed to think it was not enough. He squeezed the hand he was holding a few times, then pulled it from the side of his face to his lips. He kissed his fingers deeply, and pressed them tightly against his lips.

He passed his sigh accompanied with a smile and wrapped his knuckles with his warm breath.

That breath instantly set Jiang Suizhou’s ears on fire.

He jerked his hand, but did not pull away. On the contrary, Huo Wujiu’s grip got tighter.

The searing gaze that was brimming with laughter was so aggressive that Jiang Suizhou could not help but instinctively avert his eyes and hastily look down, like an ostrich burying its head into the sand.

This self-deceiving evasive gesture, however, made the aggressor more excited.

His muffled laughter passed along his warm lips, over his knuckles, down his arms, and sent the meridians all over his body into tingles.

——

Huo Wujiu's soldiers were very efficient.

This was also attributed to Huo Yuyan's arrangements. From the onset, he turned against Wu Qianfan, who was under Huo Wujiu's command, leaving Huo Wujiu isolated. Thereafter, he killed Wu Qianfan to silence him. The number of Huo Wujiu's men was several times more than Huo Yuyan's. What was more, Huo Yuyan's troops were mostly deployed around Ye City, so he couldn't allot his men to replace the soldiers in Jiangbei.

Therefore, except for the dead Li Sheng and his cronies, the 200,000 army that Huo Wujiu brought to the city today, were all his direct army.

In one day, they had the imperial palace and Lin'an firmly under control. Heavily armored soldiers also guarded all the residences of the officials in the capital. After Pang Wei's death, Huo Wujiu divided the army outside the city into several units and deployed them out to control the counties in Southern Jing.

Late at night, peace had already settled in all directions.

Li Changning decocted medicine and sent it to Jiang Suizhou, instructing him to take more rest in the following days and not to exert himself. Otherwise, it would be detrimental to the recovery of his wounds. So not long after drinking the medicine, Huo Wujiu forcefully had him sleep. He himself waited for Jiang Suizhou to fall asleep before heading straight out of the palace.

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Chapter 165

Presently, the Hou Zhu's bedchamber on the side was already a dark ruin without anyone around. Waiting at the door was Wei Kai and Meng Qianshan, whose eyes were flushed and anxious.

Seeing Huo Wujiu come out, Meng Qianshan greeted them.

"General…"

Huo Wujiu waved his hand and said, "Your Prince is all right. Go in and serve him. Lighten your movements. He's already asleep."

Meng Qianshan replied affirmatively, bowing straight to him with his thanks. Afterward, he turned around and noiselessly entered the palace hall.

Wei Kai also stepped forward to greet him. "General, this subordinate has already cleaned up your accommodation. It's not far from here. Let me take you there."

Huo Wujiu hummed in response and followed him.

For some reason, Wei Kai felt that his General's steps were quite brisk.

Could it be that the General was blissful because His Highness Jingwang hadn't been seriously injured and only suffered a false alarm? Not really, maybe he was wrong…

However, as soon as he entered the palace, Wei Kai discovered that his illusion was not at all an illusion.

The people serving in the palace were all the servants brought from the royal family and the soldiers under Huo Wujiu. Wei Kai led him inside and

was telling him where the front hall was, where the bedroom was, and how the Imperial City was arranged inside and outside, when he realized that his General was absent-minded.

The General casually strolled around the room, and as if he didn't hear him at all, he sat down on the couch nearby, raised his hand and poured himself a cup of tea.

When Wei Kai saw this, he waved his hand and told all the servants around them to retreat.

When he turned back, he saw that the General was holding a teacup in one hand, but wasn't drinking from it. He froze there in that posture, staring down at the surface of the water, as if in a trance.

Wei Kai frowned.

Could it be that someone tampered with the tea and the General noticed it?

He went forward pronto: "General?"

He was about to ask, but Huo Wujiu raised his eyes to look at him. There was no way to hide the smile in his eyes, and it even made his entire aura glow. Although he didn't move or laugh, he was inexplicably high-spirited.

Wei Kai was dumbfounded.

"General…?"

He watched as the General put the teacup on the table. He lifted a long leg and stepped on the edge of the couch. Next, he lifted an arm, and curled the corners of his lips.

"What's wrong with your reaction? Am I dead?" he said, "Give me a smile."

Wei Kai was speechless, but he only obediently responded with a smile.

"General, has something good happened?" he asked.

Huo Wujiu, however, raised his eyebrows.

“How do you know something good happened?”

Wei Kai: “…”

In the past, the General would indeed give them a beating when he was in a good mood, but they couldn’t do anything about it. It was only right for a person who grew up unbridled since childhood.

However, the General’s appearance today was extraordinarily underwhelming.

So, he surmised that something great must have happened.

With this conclusion, Wei Kai felt deeply astounded, and in an instant came up with an immature conjecture.

“General,” he started, “Don’t tell me you’re in a relationship with His Highness Jingwang…”

Before the word ‘relationship’ was even out of his mouth, he saw the General grinning. His hand on his knee was not honestly lying on his lap. Instead, it kept swinging in circles like a dog’s wagging tail.

Wei Kai did not expect that this immature speculation was actually true.

“Sure enough, it is about His Highness Jingwang…” He was ecstatic.

The General clicked his tongue and revealed a rather ferocious expression.

“It’s none of your business.” He said, “If you’re so free, lead the troops to inspect the palace before the third watch, especially the minister’s residence plus those concubines and eunuchs detained in the palace. Don’t let go of any troublemakers.”

Wei Kai secretly pouted.

“Yes,” he replied reluctantly.

Huo Wujiu waved his hand and said, “Get out of here.”

Wei Kai answered while cursing in his heart, and retreated.

Once the door closed, only Huo Wujiu was left in the room.

He stared at the flickering candle in front of him for a moment, and the corners of his mouth raised involuntarily.

He suddenly jumped up from the couch and paced back and forth in the room a few times.

The seven-room palace was so spacious that you could hardly see the other end from his spot, but Huo Wujiu felt that the room was very small. After walking around several times, he barely even stretched his muscles.

A certain emotion was rampaging through his limbs and bones, making his spirit intensely exhilarated and at the same time unable to find a way to vent it.

He couldn’t restrain his laughter, but this still didn’t work. It seemed that he must go for a nice ride in the night, but the imperial city he was staying in now had no vast grassland. There were only a series of palace towers that reached the sky. Perhaps he just needed to find a fight, preferably with a challenging opponent, to make him satisfied and exhausted. However, upon searching the entire Southern Jing, there seemed to be no one else who could rival him.

Or maybe… What he needed most was to take another look at Jiang Suizhou.

He didn’t have to do anything else. Just look at him, gently touch him, and stand guard by his bed, then the restlessness from his head to the tips of his toes would likely disappear.

But then again… Li Changning said that Jiang Suizhou needed a good rest at this time.

He really needed to rest. His injured and dying appearance today was still lingering in Huo Wujiu’s mind.

He also knew that Jiang Suizhou was a light sleeper and couldn’t be disturbed, so he put on a serious look and left. Even if he was spinning around in the room like a trapped beast, he still did not dare to sneak into his room.

Suddenly, he stopped, raised his head and drank the cup of tea he had just poured, then opened the door and walked out.

That night, candles lit up Huo Wujiu’s palace all night, but no one occupied the spacious room.

In the dewy night, the stars in the sky seemed to be enclosed in the square palace walls, and they lit up quietly all night on the brilliant glazed tiles.

But no one knew that for a night, Huo Wujiu sat alone on the white marble steps in front of Jiang Suizhou’s door until dawn.

He had never ever stargazed quietly for a whole night, nor had he ever, just quietly listened to the sound of a person’s breathing, which filled his heart to the brim with warmth.

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Chapter 166

Not long after Jiang Suizhou woke up the next day, he saw Huo Wujiu enter.

He was in high spirits. It seemed that he had slept well last night. Nevertheless, it was clearly summer, but when Huo Wujiu came in, he brought a damp chill, as if he went rolling in the imperial garden before sunrise.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but examine him a couple more times.

“What’s the matter?” Huo Wujiu noticed him staring at him and asked.

Jiang Suizhou met his gaze, only to see a hidden layer of dark blue underneath his pair of burning eyes.

Jiang Suizhou’s heart skipped a bit, and his timidity mixed with nervousness at first vanished like smoke in the thin air.

He could not help but smile.

“Did you not sleep well last night?” he asked.

Huo Wujiu subconsciously denied it: “I didn’t.”

Jiang Suizhou didn’t comment on it, but his gaze stopped at his eyebags.

Huo Wujiu seemed to have noticed something. He cleared his throat and sat down beside his bed solemnly: “Something urgent occurred last night. I didn’t sleep long.”

Jiang Suizhou gently smiled and did not dwell on this matter.

At this moment, the servants going in and out of his palace were all servants who came in to arrange breakfast and tidy up the palace. Huo Wujiu didn't dare to use the original servants, so these people were all brought in from Jingwang Manor. Fortunately, they were few, and there were not many masters who needed to be served, so they had enough manpower.

The two didn't speak for a while.

The morning daylight peeked in pleasantly, and when Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes, he found Huo Wujiu sitting on a chair by the bed, silently looking at him against the light.

His sitting posture was irregular, and his legs were arbitrarily folded. He was leaning back, showing an entirely casual and relaxed appearance.

However, his gaze was fiery.

Jiang Suizhou subconsciously averted his eyes and looked at the golden threads on the futon instead.

Then he heard Huo Wujiu's laughter.

Unbeknownst to him, the early morning sunlight fell on his face, illuminating his eyelashes thoroughly. It was as if they were glowing when they fell into Huo Wujiu's eyes. He felt that guarding his door all night in exchange for a glance of him in the early morning was the most worthwhile thing he had ever done in his life.

Jiang Suizhou cleared his throat, feeling hot in the ears. He lowered his eyes and changed the subject: "By the way, how is Lin'an now?"

Huo Wujiu responded, "Everything's in order in and out of the city. You don't have to worry about anything, just get well."

Jiang Suizhou was about to ask another question when he saw Wei Kai come in, carrying a bowl of dark, bitter medicine in his hand.

It was time for him to drink medicine.

In a moment, the aroma of the meal wafting through the palace room was overwhelmed by the smell of medicine. Jiang Suizhou flinched, but he resigned himself to sitting up straight.

But before he could move, Huo Wujiu got up first. He clasped the back of his shoulder with one hand and pulled the pillow next to him with the other, helping him to sit up against the bed frame.

“Relax,” Huo Wujiu said in a low voice. “Don’t tear your wounds.”

The fresh soap scent mixed with the armor’s unique iron scent caged Jiang Suizhou in place and left him in knots.

He lowered his eyes a little uncomfortably and let Huo Wujiu fiddle with him.

Wei Kai stood beside him and was about to hand over the tray in his hand when Huo Wujiu took the bowl away.

Then, he sat by the bed, and awkwardly scooped out a spoonful of medicine before blowing it cold.

He couldn’t control his breath and so he blew a spoonful of medicine back into the bowl, leaving only a pitiful bit that covered the bottom of the spoon.

Jiang Suizhou witnessed everything. The corners of his mouth could not help but curl up, and a chuckle escaped from his lips.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and glanced at him. He persevered and scooped up another spoonful of medicine.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly said, “Forget it, I’ll do it myself.”

After saying that, he reached out to pick the bowl up.

Huo Wujiu dodged to the side: “You’re still injured.”

Jiang Suizhou said warmly, “It’s not like I can’t really move. If this goes on, when will I get to drink it? Give it to me.”

He transmigrated here for half a year, and he drank countless kinds of bitter medicine, so he was used to it. Whatever medicine this was, it was extremely bitter. He’d better drink it in one gulp than to be tortured spoon by spoon.

Huo Wujiu was obviously worried, but after a moment he reluctantly handed the bowl to Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou put the jade spoon in the bowl aside, blew it, and slowly drank the warm concoction little by little.

He moved carefully but smoothly, but his brow still instinctively tightened up due to the bitterness. He only cared about dealing with the bowl of medicine in his hand, not noticing Huo Wujiu’s wrinkled brow, which had turned into a frown.

When the bowl of medicine was finally emptied, Jiang Suizhou put it down and breathed a sigh of relief.

But before he could relax, Huo Wujiu suddenly stuffed something into his mouth. In an instant, a juicy sweetness spread in his mouth, as if to force away all the bitterness left in his mouth.

It was a peeled grape.

Jiang Suizhou looked up and saw that Huo Wujiu had dragged a small table to the bedside at some point. The tribute fruits on the table were exactly the grapes from the western regions.

Huo Wujiu stuffed one into his mouth and peeled off the second one.

His hands were obviously not as skilled in peeling grapes as when drawing a bow. In fact, it was as if he had a grudge against the grapes. When he peeled off the outer skin, the grape was already almost crushed.

Before Jiang Suizhou could speak, another grape was stuffed into his mouth.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly swallowed the grapes, and hurriedly stopped him: “Stop it. You don’t have to trouble yourself so much.”

Since when was he such a noble? He used to drink his own medicine, chasing it down with a cup of tea. He was such an adult, and not afraid of suffering.

Still, he heard a snicker from Wei Kai next to him.

“Your Highness probably doesn’t know. Our General is the most afraid of bitterness.”

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and saw Huo Wujiu also raised his eyes from the plate of grapes. His fingers were dripping with grape juice, but he stared at Wei Kai with a fierce and threatening gaze.

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Chapter 167

Wei Kai sneered and quickly added, “The General barely got sick since he was a child, but when it happened once in a while, no one could get medicine into his mouth. Because of this, the late marquis beat him up, but it was useless. Maybe he is afraid of suffering, so let’s just say that he’s also afraid of you suffering, no?”

“Is your skin itchy, or do you think your head is too heavy on your shoulders?” Huo Wujiu was already gritting his teeth when he interrupted him. “Are you not going to get lost yet?!”

Wei Kai ran away with a grin.

Huo Wujiu turned back with a gloomy face, and saw Jiang Suizhou also looking at him with a smile.

“He’s talking nonsense,” Huo Wujiu blurted out.

But Jiang Suizhou looked like he didn’t believe it.

“I can’t believe I missed that,” Jiang Suizhou said with a smile. “When you first came to the royal residence, I saw you drinking medicine too, right?”

Huo Wujiu cursed Wei Kai’s loose tongue.

Who would like to drink medicine? Was such a bitter thing delicious? He would get nauseous whenever he took a sip, but he was too old to be as naughty as he was when he was a kid, no?

He disliked drinking medicine, but more than that, he hated being embarrassed.

But faced with Jiang Suizhou smile, he couldn’t get angry at all. On the contrary, his belly of anger softly turned into spring water.

… Just blame the person in front of him for being too attractive.

He clearly bared his fangs, but Jiang Suizhou wasn’t the least bit intimidated. He just looked at him and smiled. Huo Wujiu grinded his teeth. A moment later, leaned forward and while feigning ruthlessness, he wiped the grape juice on his thumb on Jiang Suizhou’s lips.

“Is it so funny? You’re laughing!”

The gnashing of his teeth was unmistakable, but so was the inseparable hint of a smile that tinged it.

——

This gave Jiang Suizhou an illusion, as if a big dog suddenly appeared beside him.

Although silent, he always circled around him quietly, licking him covertly from time to time, and then frolicking with delight.

He also didn’t know where this illusion originated. After all, in the past, he also spent time with Huo Wujiu for a period, eating and living together. There was nothing different.

Huo Wujiu stayed by his bed that day. He accompanied him in taking medicine and having breakfast with him. Because he kept a close eye on him, Jiang Suizhou was forced to eat half a bowl of porridge. In the next moment, his stomach felt hot and full, causing him to feel sleepy.

At that point, Wei Kai came back again.

“General,” he reported, “General Lou has returned from Yangzhou.”

Huo Wujiu’s brows narrowed.

The situation in the imperial city had been urgent two days ago. He was short of generals yesterday when he was dividing the troops. Yangzhou was very close to Lin’an, and the garrison of Yangzhou were acquaintances with Lou Yue. Hence, yesterday, he asked Lou Yue to lead his army to deal with Yangzhou and the surrounding counties.

Since he returned, everything must have been settled. In that case, the two of them had some private accounts to settle.

Huo Wujiu responded, stood up, and then said while bowing to Jiang Suizhou, “I have some things to deal with. I’ll be back in the evening.”

Jiang Suizhou noted the micro changes in his expression.

Although he still looked as usual, his aura turned somewhat cold. Moreover, he looked quite aggressive, as if he had been waiting for an opportunity to settle accounts with somebody.

He hurriedly asked, “What’s the matter?”

Huo Wujiu vaguely replied, “Nothing.”

But Jiang Suizhou guessed something was up.

Before leaving, Huo Wujiu also told him that Lou Yue would protect him in the city. But Lou Yue’s hand couldn’t reach into the palace after all. That day, the Hou Zhu suddenly received the news before them and detained him in the palace, which was somewhat unexpected.

Jiang Suizhou was a bit worried that the matter Huo Wujiu said he had to deal with was this.

“Be honest.” Jiang Suizhou said, “What are you going to do with Lou Yue?”

Huo Wujiu didn’t make a sound, as if he acquiesced to Jiang Suizhou’s speculation.

Jiang Suizhou sighed and explained things warmly, “If it was because I was detained by Jiang Shunheng that day, there’s no need. General Lou was also very concerned about me. However, the palace was heavily guarded, and his soldiers were stationed outside the city. Of course he could do nothing but bite his nails when the emergency happened. What’s more, didn’t he also threaten Pang Shao? If not, there was no telling if Jiang Shunheng could have left me alive these few days.”

Huo Wujiu cast his gaze down and spoke under his breath.

“Don’t you talk nonsense,” he said.

“So, are you going to go and settle the score with Lou Yue?” Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu’s ferocious momentum earlier weakened a bit, just like a wolf with its tail down.

“…But it was he who wasn’t careful.” Huo Wujiu argued stubbornly.

Jiang Suizhou retorted, “Even if he took things seriously back then, what could he do? Get detained in the palace with me?”

Huo Wujiu shut his mouth.

He was so tall. Hence, he needed to lower his head in order to talk to Jiang Suizhou while standing there. He was a bit dejected at this moment, and with his bowed head he looked rather pitiful. It gave someone an urge to pet his head and smooth his hair.

“He is your elder no matter what.” Jiang Suizhou said, “Just talk to him properly. Don’t scold and punish him. Without him, you and I would not have achieved everything today, don’t you think so?”

Huo Wujiu remained silent for a moment, and then whispered.

“As if I am that terrifying,” he said. “It’s not like I’m going to kill him; you don’t have to go to such lengths to plead for mercy.”

Jiang Suizhou burst out laughing.

In all fairness, who wouldn't be afraid of Huo Wujiu's outer appearance? With his attitude just now, Jiang Suizhou was really afraid that Huo Wujiu would take Lou Yue's life on impulse.

When Jiang Suizhou responded with such laughter, Huo Wujiu was even more dissatisfied.

He gave Wei Kai a glance, and Wei Kai slipped away with a wink. Afterward, he turned back, leaned over, and propped one hand on the pillow on the inside of Jiang Suizhou's bed.

In an instant, his shadow pressed down and enveloped Jiang Suizhou underneath him.

A sense of oppression immediately smacked Jiang Suizhou's face, taking his breath away for a while.

"…What are you doing?" His smile froze, and he stumbled over his words a bit due to nervousness.

Huo Wujiu bend forward and placed both his arms on his sides. When he lowered his head, his forehead almost rested against his.

"I'll just listen to you."

Once the aggrieved look on his face disappeared, the sense of oppression he exuded immediately climbed several dimensions.

This oppressive feeling, however, was dense with an indescribable ambiguity.

He spoke under his breath.

"Then you have to give me some reward in exchange, right?"

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Chapter 168

Jiang Suizhou leaned against the pillow behind him, but there was no way out.

Detecting his escape, Huo Wujiu looked even more stimulated, and his hands that flanked him moved a bit closer.

Their warm breaths intertwined.

“Hurry up.” He wasn’t at all satisfied with his small gains. “Don’t let General Lou wait.”

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t avoid him. Huo Wujiu’s breath fell on his face. It was warm and moist, making his heart desperately clamor in his chest.

“…Then you close your eyes,” he stuttered after a while.

Huo Wujiu obediently closed his eyes without delay with the corners of his mouth curling up.

Jiang Suizhou’s eyes lingered on his lips. Although they were close at hand, they made him shrink back.

He froze for a second, then closed his eyes, raised his head, and printed a kiss on Huo Wujiu’s forehead.

It was fast and slapdash, separating after a touch.

Huo Wujiu opened his eyes and found that Jiang Suizhou was still back in the same place. He rightfully said, “Okay, you can go now.”

Those eyes were very clear. At this moment, they were shrouded in Huo Wujiu's arms, so when he looked at him, he radiated an indescribable innocence and obedience.

Huo Wujiu raised his hand and touched his forehead.

That kiss was too short, and there wasn't even much of the warmth left. All that remained was a soft illusory touch. It was akin to a finger gently stroking his heart.

Huo Wujiu gritted his teeth: "Is that it?"

Although Jiang Suizhou was feeling a bit guilty, he still nodded.

Huo Wujiu clicked his tongue.

The next moment, his black shadow suddenly swooped down, and his breath instantly closed in.

He turned his head and kissed Jiang Suizhou's lips heavily.

Huo Wujiu himself didn't have the least bit of experience. Drive by impulse, it was more like a rampant collision than a kiss. Even his teeth knocked against Jiang Suizhou's lips. He embodied a wild beast that couldn't play coquettish at all and instead wanted to pounce on people. It was painful, but could let others feel that fiery passion.

This kiss didn't last long. After a bit of tossing and turning, they parted.

Huo Wujiu pressed against Jiang Suizhou's forehead and smiling said in a mute whisper, "I'm leaving, ah."

After saying that, he propped himself up on the bed and stood up. He raised his hand and wiped Jiang Suizhou's lips intimately before turning around and striding away.

Jiang Suizhou was left overwhelmed. He watched his back for a moment, then raised his hand and touched his lips with his knuckles.

A few moments later, he let out a gentle laugh.

It's really…like being bitten by something.

Meanwhile, Wei Kai, who was standing upright outside the room, heard approaching footsteps and looked up.

He discovered that the General seemed to have wind at his feet. He was walking with vigorous strides with the scarlet cloak behind him fluttering up. He obviously was walking, but he appeared as if he was riding a horse.

"General!" Wei Kai stepped forward and noticed the moisture on the General's lips under the bright sunlight.

Wei Kai stared at the moisture and smiled pleasantly. He looked a bit silly.

The General raised his eyes and gave him a sidelong glance.

The next moment, he launched a merciless kick toward the unsuspecting Wei Kai, causing him to stumble.

The kick wasn't at all strong, but Wei Kai almost fell to the ground with a yelp. He saw that the General hadn't withdrawn his feet yet, but the corners of his mouth were raised. He was grinning ear to ear, so much that the tips of his canine teeth, which had been indistinct in the past, peeked out.

The General then turned around and walked away. When he turned around, he also raised his hand and wiped his lower lip with his thumb.

A ruffian embodying an insatiable wild wolf.

"Follow me."

That deep and arrogant voice was no different from the old days.

But Wei Kai could vaguely tell that the General had kicked him, not because he had done something wrong or was in a daze just now.

It was simply because he was sprinkling joy.

He grimaced and limped forward after him.

——

The Imperial City was now heavily guarded, and it was already Huo Wujiu’s territory.

Lou Yue waited in the imperial study. After a while, he heard a report from the soldiers that General Huo would be there soon. He could not sit still in his chair, so upon hearing the report, he jolted up and rubbed his hands awkwardly.

Huo Wujiu strode in from behind. He flicked his cloak without care of his elders and sat down on the throne.

Lou Yue was about to greet him, but Huo Wujiu waved his hand and said, “It’s fine, sit.”

Lou Yue clasped his hands in front of him, stood there in embarrassment, and didn’t move for a while.

He also watched Huo Wujiu grow up. He knew that this arrogant boy who was not afraid of anything always acted on what he said. He never joked or broke his promise.

What was more, everything indeed happened due to his negligence. He was the one who failed to carry out Huo Wujiu’s orders.

He was also quite fond of Jingwang. He was so guilty of letting the former Emperor capture him right under his own nose and leaving him to suffer such a great crime that nearly cost him his life. For a moment, he even wished that Huo Wujiu would stand by his word and punish him.

Against all expectations, Huo Wujiu looked up at him and stepped on the throne. “What are you afraid of now? The man’s not dead.”

Lou Yue replied in a deep voice, “It was indeed my oversight. I have no excuse. Now that you are also considered my superior, how you chastise me is up to you.”

“So you also know that it’s due to your negligence?” Huo Wujiu rested his arm on his knee.

For some reason, Lou Yue felt that although his voice was unkind, he wasn’t entirely furious. On the contrary, his voice bore a lofty and frivolous undertone.

Huo Wujiu continued, “My father has told you quite a few times before, hasn’t he? As a military general, don’t just think about going to war all day long. Even if you’re not involved, you still have to understand a bit about those twists and turns in the imperial court, don’t you think so?”

Lou Yue sullenly replied, then he saw Huo Wujiu leaning back.

Lou Yue was stunned at his words, so he hesitantly said, “But…”

What exactly are you talking about now?

According to Huo Wujiu’s temper, he shouldn’t be wasting time to talk to him at this moment and instead order people to dispose of him based on military law.

Huo Wujiu interrupted him. He raised his hand and asked the soldier next to him to pour Lou Yue a cup of tea.

“No buts,” he said. “This matter is over. Don’t mention it again.”

Lou Yue was quite shocked: “But…why?

Huo Wujiu glanced at him, raised his hand unconsciously and touched his lips.

That hand also blocked the corners of his slightly curled lips.

“Because you’re my elder, ah,” he replied.

——

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Chapter 169

Lou Yue was stunned.

“Hurry up and take a seat. How are things in Yangzhou?” Huo Wujiu cleared his throat and changed the subject.

Lou Yue was still at a loss, but he didn’t dare to slack off when Huo Wujiu asked about the business. He replied, “Everything’s in order. Fortunately, the generals of those counties are my old friends. When the news of the late Emperor’s death spread, they knew they had no other option, so they all surrendered. I think the other counties in the state are more or less the same. After all, they each defended a separate area, and their forces were fragmented. Now that they’re leaderless, even if they’re unwilling, they will not resist.”

Huo Wujiu hummed: “It won’t take long for the entire south of the Chang River to be under control.”

Lou Yue agreed, but then frowned: “But have you thought about what to do afterward?”

Huo Wujiu looked at him and saw Lou Yue sitting there, also looking at him worriedly.

“A country cannot live without a ruler for a day. Although we have a mighty army at our disposal to suppress the entire Southern Jing, this is not a long-term solution after all. Now, be it Lin’an or other counties, civil servants are all being held hostage, and the Yamen are no longer useful. We’ll have to contact Northern Liang quickly for them to send officials and generals to recover the lost territories.”

However, when Huo Wujiu heard his proposal, he frowned and fell silent for a while.

He tapped his fingers on his knees, as if in thought.

Lou Yue was somewhat puzzled. After a moment, he reacted and hesitantly asked, “Are you… Don’t you want to hand Southern Jing over to Northern Liang?”

When this thought popped up, a face suddenly flashed before his eyes.

Could it be because of Jingwang?!

Huo Wujiu went out to borrow soldiers, but the only matter that worried him was Jingwang. On his return that day and heard that Jingwang had been captured, he looked as if he would go crazy. *Don’t tell me that.…*

Lou Yue was dumbfounded: “You’re not thinking of appointing a new ruler, are you?”

Huo Wujiu raised his head and stared at him.

Lou Yue captured his intention with a hint of certainty from his gaze.

“You have to think clearly!” Lou Yue advised.

Huo Wujiu wasn’t just anybody. If he was just a random general of Northern Liang, it would be understandable for him to pick such a choice. But he was not. He was the nephew of the new emperor of Northern Liang, and he was the only son of the Marquis of Dingbei who had instigated a rebellion against Southern Jing.

He had inseparable blood ties with the Northern Liang, and this was an unstable factor whether to the Northern Liang or the Southern Jing. Even if the new Emperor of Northern Liang acquiesced and Jiang Suizhou agreed, it would be difficult to quell the material disputes between the great powers. It would be impossible for the two states to maintain this awkward relationship forever.

Huo Wujiu quietly stared at him for a moment and then slowly exhaled.

“What if I say, I don’t know?” he asked.

Lou Yue was rendered speechless.

Looking closely at Huo Wujiu, he found that he was frowning. He also lowered his head, raised his hand and rubbed his eyebrows.

“How annoying,” he whispered to himself.

His current reaction puzzled Lou Yue a bit.

This couldn’t have been a better decision in Lou Yue’s mind. Destroying Southern Jing was something Huo Wujiu had been doing all along, and he didn’t hesitate a least bit when he killed the Southern Jing’s Emperor.

The only thing that was difficult to deal with was probably His Highness Jingwang’s identity.

But giving him a clean identity couldn’t be easier for Huo Wujiu, no?

Could it be that the problem lies in Northern Liang?

Lou Yue didn’t dare to speak any further, nor could he ask more questions. Instead, he waited there quietly.

A few moments later, Huo Wujiu again exhaled.

“It’s okay.” He said, “Even if the surrounding counties have surrendered, we need to be more vigilant. Those things must never cause trouble again.”

Lou Yue answered in a deep voice.

Huo Wujiu waved his hand and let him leave.

Once Lou Yue left, the imperial study was empty. All of Jiang Shunheng’s things on the desk were cleared out, but yet again, memorials piled up on the huge desk.

They were all letters and memorials that the generals inside and outside the city sent over.

Huo Wujiu leaned back on the throne, without looking at them. He knew exactly what was written on those memorials.

The bones of scholars had always been harder than life. Even if they were suppressed at this time, they would never live in peace. Moreover, there were countless people in Southern Jing. A day or two without a parental official was nothing, but they couldn’t be left unattended for a year and a half.

He knew just how chaotic Southern Jing was.

However, for the first time in his life, he avoided it and did not want to let himself think about the Northern Liang.

He had no idea how much his uncle knew about what his cousin had done, or perhaps it was precisely what his uncle instigated; he did not know when his elder brother, who had gone through life and death with him and entrusted each other with their backs, dreaded him to the extent of walking step by step onto this path.

He was now only in his early twenties. In his short life, all he learned was how to kill his enemies. He never learned how to deal with close relatives who had changed from the past.

Even before his father died, he used his last breath to ask Huo Wujiu to take good care of his close relatives.

He looked at the table full of paperwork. For a spell, he felt quite bewildered.

This kind of confusion would most likely give people the illusion of being lonely.

The daylight outside the window was in full bloom. It hadn’t been long since daybreak; it was not even noon.

However, he already started to miss Jiang Suizhou.

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Chapter 170

Huo Wujiu got back very late that night.

Even if he didn’t want to face everything, the trivial matters that were sent to him still needed to be dealt with.

In Lin’an alone, a lot of things could happen in one day, let alone the entire Southern Jing. Even if Huo Wujiu was perfunctory, by the time all the documents on his desk were cleaned up, the moon was already hanging amidst the branches.

When he stood up, he felt like he was about to fall apart.

He rarely felt this way. Even after days of marching, he had never been this tired.

But he didn’t expect that sitting motionless for a whole day would also be fatal.

He stood in place with some chagrin and moved his aching shoulders and neck a few times before turning around and leaving the imperial study.

The night outside was very cool.

However, a palanquin had long been parked outside the palace. The palace was vast, and every corner was quite distant. If people were just to rely on their legs, an ordinary pampered master would probably be incapable of walking.

Despite that, Huo Wujiu merely gave the palanquin a passing glance, then passed by it, walking back on his own.

He sat all day; his back was quite sore. Now he felt nauseated at the mere sight of a chair. If he really let them carry him back, he was afraid that his bones would break into pieces.

Huo Wujiu walked with huge strides.

The people behind couldn’t keep up with him, so they all trotted along. By the time Huo Wujiu was finally back to the palace where he was staying, the people who followed him were panting.

Huo Wujiu walked all the way to Jiang Suizhou’s door and stopped, but did not go inside.

Wei Kai, behind him, hurried forward and asked, “General?”

Huo Wujiu frowned: “What time is it?”

Wei Kai replied, “There are still two quarters left before the third watch.”

Huo Wujiu gave a chagrined tsk, turned around and left.

Wei Kai quickly followed him: “General, where are you going?”

Huo Wujiu didn’t even turn his head: “Back to bed.”

His voice betrayed clenched teeth in bitter hatred.

Wei Kai promptly sighed: “Didn’t you say this morning that you would come to see His Highness Jingwang in the evening?”

Huo Wujiu gritted his teeth and cursed inwardly: *This kid really knows how to touch a sore spot.*

Of course he wanted to go see Jiang Suizhou. He suffered a day of exhaustion in the imperial study room for nothing. The memorials were teeming with words, and reading them made him dizzy and his back sore. He had endured this kind pain, which was akin to a dull knife cutting his flesh. Wasn’t it in an attempt to quickly see Jiang Suizhou quicker?

But it was now deep into the night. He was afraid to disturb Jiang Suizhou's rest.

He was already weak, plus he hadn't fully recovered from his previous illness. Now that he was injured again, the mere thought of the torture he had suffered all day prevented Huo Wujiu from sitting still.

At this moment, he would rather go back and toss and turn all night than wake Jiang Suizhou.

Hearing Wei Kai's thoughtless words, he was a little annoyed. He turned around and was about to say something when he saw Meng Qianshan pushing the door out of the palace room.

Meng Qianshan was carrying a basin and was about to come out to work, but he unexpectedly bumped into Huo Wujiu who was standing at the bottom of the stairs and was about to leave. This really startled him.

"General Huo?" Meng Qianshan quickly called him to a stop. "Why don't you go in?"

Huo Wujiu turned around and looked up at Meng Qianshan: "I'm not going. Serve your Prince and let him sleep well."

Meng Qianshan was a little confused.

"The Prince is still awake, waiting for you!" he said.

Wei Kai was stunned upon hearing this. He turned his head and was about to call for the General, but he felt a gust of wind blowing in front of him. The coolness carried two points of sharpness.

He followed the wind and discovered that the General was already heading into the room.

The General's stature was still stable, and from behind, he looked majestic and reliable. There wasn't a hint of anxiousness at all.

…However, if he walked up the stairs slower, instead of almost sprinting at full speed, he would have successfully shown a more stable aura.

——

Huo Wujiu strode toward the palace and turned to the bedroom. He saw Jiang Suizhou leaning on his bed to read, letting out yawns one after another.

He was still holding a volume of book loosely in his hand, but the book was already tilted to one side. At first glance, he was all in all drowsy.

Huo Wujiu took a few steps forward and jerked the book out of his hand.

“Why are you reading when you’re this sleepy?” He appeared a bit upset, but his tone was soft.

When the book in Jiang Suizhou’s hand was suddenly jerked away by Huo Wujiu, he was startled. He glanced up to the culprit, then saw Huo Wujiu, who was exuding the cool air of the night.

He gently smiled.

“Come on, wasn’t it you who said this morning that you were coming back in the evening?”

He slowly and methodically reached out and took the book in Huo Wujiu’s hand. He sorted it out and put it aside. “Why did you come back so late? Did you just finish working?”

The candle in the room was burning brightly, giving off a nice and warm feeling. Jiang Suizhou was so sleepy that his voice was a bit mute. His tone also turned softer than usual.

However, these few simple words gave rise to a wonderful feeling deep in Huo Wujiu’s heart. This feeling was something he had never felt before. After all, he had been out on the battlefield for many years, and had never experienced the feeling of being waited for back home.

It was as if the fatigue and irritation he had suffered all day vanished into thin air.

He sat down at the edge of the bed and reached out to seek Jiang Suizhou’s hand.

“A bit too much is going on, so I came back late.”He brought Jiang Suizhou’s hand to his chest and rubbed it. “I only said I’ll come, not to let you stay awake. What is there to wait for?”

His tone was serious, but Jiang Suizhou heard something not quite right.

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Chapter 171

He did not reply when he heard his admonishment, but leaned back on the bed and laughed. With a pair of smiling eyes, he quietly stared at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu's heart skipped wildly at his stare.

He gritted his teeth and leaned forward. He might have been clumsy the first time, but he got accustomed soon enough, nibbling gently on Jiang Suizhou's lips.

"What's so funny?" he whispered.

Jiang Suizhou dodged to the side to hide, but Huo Wujiu caught up with him. This simple nibble gradually developed into an entanglement between lips and teeth.

Huo Wujiu had no experience, and only followed his instincts. He had no control and acted recklessly. In a few blinks, Jiang Suizhou was already a bit breathless, so he raised his hand and directly pushed him away.

Huo Wujiu knew that he was hurt, so he didn't dare to struggle hard. Hence, after he pushed him twice, he sat back along with his push.

Jiang Suizhou was busy catching his breath, while Huo Wujiu merely sat there. He stared at him with the corners of his mouth unabashedly curled up, looking proud and flamboyant.

Jiang Suizhou gave him a couple of glances. Fortunately, the man had no tail. Otherwise, it would have risen to the heavens.

However, he noticed that Huo Wujiu's appearance at this time was quite different from when he entered the door just now.

Jiang Suizhou had some guesses.

Seeing Jiang Suizhou looking at him, Huo Wujiu moved forward, having an urge to nibble at him more.

Such things were addictive after the first time.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't push him away, so he received another kiss that rendered him muddleheaded. After the kiss, he was already leaning on Huo Wujiu's shoulder and was firmly wrapped in his arms.

"No more fooling around," Jiang Suizhou gasped and admonished him softly.

Huo Wujiu promised solemnly, but before he could finish his promise, he lowered his head again and kissed him gently on the lips.

He was entirely presumptuous and undoubtedly emboldened.

Jiang Suizhou was also too lazy to argue with him, so he let him hug him.

After a while, he asked, "Were the things you dealt with today troublesome?"

Huo Wujiu paused.

Of course, everything was tricky. He was grown up yet had never dealt much with civilian court matters. Those people weren't prisoners of war, so they couldn't be killed in one go. What was more, they might be of use in the future.

But the change of dynasties had always been the most unacceptable for them. Even if they were alive, they would never be at ease. In Lin'an alone, three urgent letters were sent in one day, all of which were from the Minister of Ceremonies' residence. It said that when Lord Qi Min heard that Huo Wujiu killed the Emperor, he directly knocked himself against the

garrisons' swords. He asked Huo Wujiu to give the civil and military officials a good ending. If he were planning to kill them, he could stab or kill them. There was no need to keep them so that they could be humiliated.

Huo Wujiu naturally got a headache from this matter.

But at this moment, he was embracing Jiang Suizhou in his arms, and there were only a few thin layers of clothes between them.

Jiang Suizhou's warm body temperature and fluctuating breathing were continuously passed on to him, which made him feel that these troublesome matters weren't that difficult to deal with. There was no need to bother Jiang Suizhou.

"They're just trivial matters," he said. "Nothing more."

Jiang Suizhou thought that he was just stubborn and reluctant to admit defeat.

He was about to look up at him, but Huo Wujiu seemed to have perceived his motives. He quickly raised his hand, pushed him back into his arms and hugged him tightly.

"Why? You still can't trust me?" Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou said, "No, it's just that they're always a bit difficult to deal with, plus you're from Northern Liang…"

Hearing him say that, alarm bells started to ring in Huo Wujiu's heart.

In all likelihood, Jiang Suizhou meant that he wanted to help him deal with everything.

Seriously…It was only two days since he was injured. What was he doing, meddling in this mess?

Huo Wujiu flatly refused.

“It’s nothing,” he said. “Even Southern Jing’s old ministers are just a group of scholars. I kept them alive because I could deal with them.”

Jiang Suizhou promptly said, “You can’t kill people indiscriminately.”

Huo Wujiu clicked his tongue.

“Am I this kind of person in your eyes?” he asked with downcast eyes.

Jiang Suizhou smothered a laugh.

“Of course not.” He said, “It’s just that those scholars can be a bit unpleasant to the ears in a moment of desperation, so I’m afraid you’ll take it personally.”

Huo Wujiu gave him a gentle pinch on his face.

“Then rest assured,” he said. “I’m also afraid of accidentally killing someone and not being able to explain myself to you when I come back.”

Speaking of which, he lowered his head and let his lips gently touch Jiang Suizhou’s hair.

“Anyway, don’t worry. Just take care of your injuries.” He said, “Since I beat this place down, do you think I can’t manage it? If I can’t, then just beat it again.”

The second half of his sentence was clearly a light joke, and Jiang Suizhou laughed.

“Fine. I know you know how to fight,” he answered.

The two made small talk, and during their chitchat, the night gradually deepened. Jiang Suizhou was easily exhausted after taking the medicine. As he spoke, he gradually became sleepy again.

Huo Wujiu was keenly aware of it.

He didn’t say anything, but softened his voice. After a while, the sound of even and subtle breathing came from his arms.

He lowered his head cautiously, and what he saw was Jiang Suizhou’s sleeping face.

He leaned quietly in his arms and slept soundly.

This realization made Huo Wujiu’s entire heart tingle. He felt itchy and in utter disorder.

Jiang Suizhou was the most beautiful person he had ever seen in his more than twenty years of life. His eyes had always been above the top, he had thoughts of taking a person as his own, but hesitated to move forward.

But now, all his delusions and fantasies had come true.

He finally embraced this person into his arms, so of course, he was unwilling to let him go through the least bit of a storm.

He would keep everything behind him, whether he was proficient at these things, or not.

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Chapter 172

Jiang Suizhou was keenly aware of Huo Wujiu's exhaustion in recent days.

He never complained. After finishing his daily work in the middle of the court, Huo Wujiu visited Jiang Suizhou as usual. He insisted on seeing how he was recovering, and then he would accompany him to sleep.

He still looked as usual, but the dark smudges under his eyes were getting heavier by the day.

Every time Jiang Suizhou opened his mouth to ask, Huo Wujiu stopped him, saying that he was fine.

He couldn't ask any further.

After a few days like this, Jiang Suizhou recovered well, and gradually he was able to walk on the ground.

The wounds on his body had scabbed over, and he was getting better every day. Li Changning's medical skills were excellent. Seeing that his wounds were recovering well, he added a few medicinal herbs to replenish his qi and blood and to warm his meridians.

However, Huo Wujiu was still not at ease.

Seeing Jiang Suizhou off the bed, Huo Wujiu appeared as if he was facing a formidable enemy. His nerves were tense, and he had an urge to support him back to bed after just a short while.

Wei Kai, a bystander, couldn't bear to look steadily at him.

As long as their General did not lose an arm or a leg, everything would remain unchanged no matter how seriously injured he was. He was like this himself, even when he was under the Emperor. He never saw him so timid and overcautious.

Sure enough, ‘love’ could change one’s temperament.

Although Jiang Suizhou did not say much these days, he had been silently observing Huo Wujiu’s state.

He knew how tough, stubborn and tolerant Huo Wujiu was. Even when there were times he couldn’t support it, he wouldn’t take the initiative to show weakness. What was more, he had been injured these days, so Huo Wujiu was cautious with him. Naturally, he hid the things he had to face even deeper.

But Jiang Suizhou didn’t want to let him go on like this.

Huo Wujiu used to be so stubborn, that was because he was really alone. Everyone considered him an undefeatable God of War, so everyone relied on him. Naturally, he had no way to rely on others, so he could only support himself.

But it shouldn’t be the same now.

Jiang Suizhou waited quietly until today.

After Huo Wujiu left early in the morning, he drank the medicine that Li Changning brought. He felt in good spirits, and felt that his body was lighter, so he got out of bed and went for a walk outside the palace.

The palace he was living in presently was behind the late Hou Zhu’s bedchamber. It was supposedly the palace where the beloved concubines lived, but because the Hou Zhu was always impartial, it had long been empty.

The courtyard had a great view. Meng Qianshan, who was following him, told him with a smile that General Huo was living in the side hall and had

been accompanying him every day.

He spoke sweetly and smiled happily. Jiang Suizhou smiled and glanced at him, but did not say anything.

He raised his eyes to look into the distance and saw a scene in the palace garden, which made the resplendent and magnificent pavilions stand out quite interestingly.

He went out today, not to see them.

He just wanted to check how well he had recovered and how far he could go.

The result of this attempt was satisfactory to him.

He stood under the porch for a while, then went back to the house and waited until nightfall.

It was past the second watch, but Huo Wujiu still hasn't returned. In the normal course of events, he would have been already at Jiang Suizhou's palace at this hour. Today, he must have encountered some kind of trouble if he still out so late.

Jiang Suizhou sat there quietly for a while and then got up.

Seeing him get out of bed, Meng Qianshan hurriedly greeted him: "Your Highness?"

Jiang Suizhou said in a light voice: "Change my clothes, and have someone prepare the palanquin. I'm going out."

Meng Qianshan anxiously advised, "Your Highness, it's darker outside. You're not yet well…"

"Then prepare a thicker cloak for me," Jiang Suizhou ordered.

Meng Qianshan still hesitated: "This…"

Jiang Suizhou raised his head and looked at him: “What? Do my orders not work anymore?”

Meng Qianshan squeezed his right hand with his left hand, feeling a little cramped.

Jiang Suizhou continued, “Huo Wujiu had ordered, right? Just go, he won’t do anything to you.”

Seeing how resolute Jiang Suizhou was, Meng Qianshan really had no choice, so he could only clench his teeth, stomp his foot, and carry Jiang Suizhou’s order out.

——

Huo Wujiu was indeed a bit overwhelmed.

Those Pang Party officials, who were originally difficult to deal with, had settled a lot at this time. They originally had no mind of their own, and now that their benefits were exhausted, they fell apart. When the one in power was lost, they abandoned him. When Pang Shao held real power in his hands, they followed him around. But now that Huo Wujiu was the one in power along with a massive army, they were very obedient and didn’t give Huo Wujiu any trouble at all.

The people who were difficult to deal with were a bunch of self-proclaimed purist scholars.

The Jing Dynasty was over. From morning till night, they repeatedly threatened to commit suicide and shouted abuse at the soldiers. However, Huo Wujiu could not indulge them to death. After all, if more courtiers were to die, the world would be in panic.

There wasn’t a day when those people did not give him trouble.

This was just as well. After a few days, Huo Wujiu was skilled in dealing with them. But today, the one that bothered him the most was his uncle.

The movement in Southern Jing naturally didn’t escape the Northern Liang’s watch. The new Emperor of the Northern Liang Dynasty, Emperor Zhao Yuan, and Huo Wujiu’s uncle, had sent letters to him. They just arrived in the morning.

The letters were stamped with the imperial seal, proving they were genuine.

Huo Wujiu put the letter on the table. Just as he was distracted, someone came to report, saying that Lord Qi Min sought death again today. Fortunately, he was stopped in time, and didn’t die. Still, he was slightly injured.

The news was like a spark falling into a dry pile of firewood.

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Chapter 173

“Can’t you even watch over a person properly?” Huo Wujiu snapped furiously. “He’s just a powerless old man. How could he torment you guys into such wimps?”

The person who came to report the incident hastily explained that Qi-daren was emotionally unstable and was unwilling to communicate with anyone from the Northern Liang, so they really was helpless.

“I don’t believe it. You tied his hands and feet, gagged him, and poured three meals into his mouth every day. How could he die?” Huo Wujiu gritted his teeth. His voice was so cold that it was frightening.

The people did not dare to raise their heads. They shivered in response, knelt down and asked General Huo to calm down.

“Then why don’t you get lost?”

Huo Wujiu hurled a memorial to the ground.

If he were to take another look at the informant, he might resort to killing.

The man repeatedly responded and made a move to retreat.

But at that moment, a clear and crisp voice came somewhere, “Wait.”

The people in the imperial study were all startled.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and saw that Jiang Suizhou was standing by the screen at the back of the imperial study room at some point. His complexion was still unsightly, and he looked a bit pale. He was wearing a

heavy black fur overcoat and was wrapped in a cloak. It was clearly summer, but he was dressed for autumn.

The soldier kneeling on the ground also broke out in a cold sweat.

Who's courting death? Who dares to interrupt the General when he is seething?

Since the later Marquis's death, there was no longer another person who had the guts to do so.

The soldier was kneeling in place, unable to advance or retreat, so he had no choice but to keep still.

However, he heard a noise from the imperial desk, meaning the General had stood up.

The General not only did not condemn the culprit in anger, but hurriedly rose to his feet, met the man and supported him.

"What brings you here?" The voice sounded a little flustered. Even his thunderous anger just now immediately dissipated a lot.

The culprit spoke.

"I wouldn't have heard you lose your temper if I hadn't come."

The voice flowed gently. Perhaps it was due to poor health and weak breath, it sounded clear, mild and a little soft.

"It's nothing. It's just a small matter." Their General actually explained somewhat hastily. "The night is so cool, so how could you go out and walk so far? How is Meng Qianshan doing his job?"

The man chuckled softly: "Why? Are you going to punish my people too?"

When General Huo heard these words, he fell silent.

Now, the soldier, kneeling in front of the imperial desk, felt more compelled to have a look at this divine person.

It must be an immortal who descended to the earth who could achieve much with little effort, who could render their livid and uncontrollable General into such good behavior, right?

He did not dare to look up. He only listened as the General helped the man and supported him to take a seat on the imperial throne. Afterward, the General stood beside him.

The man spoke again.

“Get up and talk,” he said.

This was addressed to the soldier kneeling there. The soldier did not dare to move for a while. The moment he looked up cautiously, he heard the General’s voice: “Are you deaf?”

The soldier quickly stood up.

“What just happened?” The man asked again.

This time, the soldier stood straight, and when he looked up, he saw the man’s face.

The man’s face was extremely delicate, to the point of being somewhat bewitching and feminine. He was young, but with the appearance of an unhealed sick body. His dark robe was graceful and intricate, wrapping him in it. He exuded a reserved and arrogant noble attitude, but his expression was calm.

The soldier’s courage grew stronger.

“My Lord, it’s a matter related to the Minister of Ceremonies’ residence,” he answered.

“What’s the matter?” the man asked.

“The Minister … hasn’t been in a good mood these days and is always committing suicide,” the soldier reported.

The gentleman raised his head and looked at General Huo who was standing beside him.

“I remember that Qi-daren isn’t such a person,” he said. “What have you been doing these days?”

General Huo looked down at him.

The general was born tall and upright. Now that he was wearing a military uniform, he should be unrestrained and arrogant, but at this moment, he bowed his head. Although there was no change in his expression, he still looked a bit tame, like a wild wolf that had recognized its master.

“… I haven’t done anything either.” General Huo’s tone reeked of defiance, but a little weak. “I haven’t figured out what to do with them, so I restricted them in their old residences for the time being.”

Then the gentleman chuckled lightly, sounding a bit helpless.

“Do you think they are captives?” He said, “If you really want to kill them, such an excuse is totally understandable. But since you do not have such an intention, you should have at least treated them with courtesy in order to appease their hearts.”

Pacifying people’s hearts was their blind spot of knowledge.

Huo Wujiu, along with his generals and soldiers, had started by defending the gates against enemies. For them, it was always quick to kill local officials after the victory, so leaving them alive was already a special forgiveness.

They had lost, so did they still need appeasing?

The soldier also scratched his head in confusion.

The gentleman pulled over a piece of rice paper and wrote something on it.

After a while, he put down the pen, picked up the piece of paper, read it back and forth, and then slowly let the ink dry.

“But now, I guess no matter what you do, they won’t listen.” The gentleman said, “In that case, I’d like to trouble you to deliver this letter to Qi-daren on my behalf. You don’t have to say anything. The letter has my signature, so you don’t have to worry about what happens next.”

As he spoke, the ink had dried. The gentleman folded the paper and placed it on the desk.

The soldier walked forward to get it, and when he raised his eyes, he saw the gentleman gently smiling at him.

“Go ahead,” he said.

The soldier promptly bowed and retreated.

Before leaving the imperial study, he secretly raised his eyes and saw that the gentleman was whispering something to General Huo. General Huo put one hand on the armrest of the throne and bowed his head obediently. The ferocity he had minutes ago was nowhere to be seen.

The imperial study was brilliantly lit, and for a while, a trace of harmony and peace reigned.

The soldier hadn’t read any books, but the word ‘obedient’ suddenly popped out of his mind.

Every item had a weakness.

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Chapter 174

Huo Wujiu was actually feeling guilty.

He didn’t know why he was guilty, but when Jiang Suizhou was sitting there and he was looking down at the side of his face, he felt a little lost.

… After all, Jiang Suizhou had witnessed him throwing a fit. What was more, if you looked at the surface, he was still in the middle of losing his temper.

He never thought that he would one day be afraid of this.

In the past, unless forced to do so, he had always acted from the heart. People who fought in wars were all rolled out of mud. Their face was the most important thing, not to mention arbitrary behavior on ordinary days. That was the most common thing.

But… he was actually a bit afraid of letting Jiang Suizhou see such a thing.

He didn’t realize that he unconsciously developed a kind of psychology that only male peacocks had. When courting, peacocks would spread out all their tail feathers and present themselves magnificently in front of their sweethearts. They were absolutely unwilling to show the gray tail behind the feathers, not the least bit of that unsightly appearance.

Huo Wujiu just stood there apprehensively.

Jiang Suizhou slowly picked up a few envelopes from the table, read them briefly, and put them back.

He looked up at Huo Wujiu.

“Is this what you told me every day, nothing?” Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu gave a start, and immediately recovered from the chagrin he had just felt.

He opened his mouth but couldn’t string a phrase together at the moment.

After a while, he retorted in a whisper, “It’s not a big deal.”

Jiang Suizhou’s finger tapped on the desk.

“If you hid everything for just a few more days, there would be a murder in the capital.” He said, “By then, the whole world will only say that you, Huo Wujiu, treated the old ministers of the previous dynasty harshly and killed the loyalists indiscriminately. By then, who will you reason out with?”

But Huo Wujiu didn’t care about it: “They can say whatever they want. Let them write it in history books.”

Jiang Suizhou blurted out, “Now way. How can you let historians criticize you like this and leave it for future generations to see?”

His tone was surprisingly serious.

When Huo Wujiu heard this, he looked straight at Jiang Suizhou and discovered that he, who had his head raised, looked flustered.

“I mean, you have to cherish your prestige…”

He explained.

Then Huo Wujiu burst out laughing.

His Highness Jingwang really couldn’t lie. How could this be about cherishing his prestige? It was clear that this infamous Prince was partial to his, Huo Wujiu’s, reputation and loved him to death.

Now that Huo Wujiu gained his favor, his courage also redoubled. He moved forward, then squeezed onto the throne next to Jiang Suizhou and sat

down.

Fortunately, the throne was spacious and could accommodate both of them. But even so, they were too close together. Huo Wujiu stretched out his arms and enfolded Jiang Suizhou in his arms.

He slowly exhaled and rested his chin on Jiang Suizhou's shoulder. When he spoke again, his tone already weakened to something like a compromise.

"I didn't want you to be bothered by all this." He said, "It's just that… I really can't handle these kinds of issues well."

"Even if you hide it from me, I can still see it," Jiang Suizhou warmly said.

"But you're not healed yet," Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou retorted, "But didn't I still come out today?"

Huo Wujiu bared his teeth and said fiercely, "So Meng Qianshan should be punished."

"You're the one who deserves punishment," Jiang Suizhou raised his hand without mercy and pinched Huo Wujiu's forearm.

The muscles of his arm were firm, as hard as a rock. When Jiang Suizhou pinched it hard, his own hand hurt instead.

He retracted his hand in embarrassment and heard Huo Wujiu's muffled laughter.

Jiang Suizhou's ears reddened, but he also ignored him. He organized the rolled memorials that Huo Wujiu tossed all over the desk and unraveled them one by one.

"I am much better. I can help you with these things," Jiang Suizhou said.

This was a fact. Compared with Huo Wujiu, a high-ranking general who could only wield a sword, shoot, fight and kill, as a history teacher who had

transmigrated from over a thousand years later, at least he knew all the ministers in the Southern Jing Dynasty like the back of his hand.

He generally knew what kind of temperament they had. It went without saying that he knew who was useful and who was discontented with their lot.

Huo Wujiu, however, disagreed.

“You’re not well enough yet. Don’t fool around,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou turned his face sideways and glanced at him lightly.

Huo Wujiu was dissatisfied. He clicked his tongue fiercely, but did not speak.

After a while, as if venting his anger, he leaned forward and kissed Jiang Suizhou ruthlessly on the lips, and said, “It’s okay for you to work, but I must follow you.”

Jiang Suizhou didn’t refute this.

This was why Huo Wujiu compromised and pushed the books and memorials on the desk in front of Jiang Suizhou.

However, in a spot Jiang Suizhou did not see, he turned around and hid the handwritten letter from Emperor Zhao Yuan.

The candle flame quietly burned, occasionally emitting a spark or two crackling sound. Jiang Suizhou unrolled the memorials accumulated on the desk wholeheartedly, while Huo Wujiu quietly stood aside,just watching him without a word.

In recent days, Huo Wujiu had always hated the imperial study room, yet he forced himself to come, holding back his revulsion.

But this time, he felt that the candle lights in the imperial study room were bright and peaceful, making the room the best place in the world.

The difference was that there was just one more person present.

This man was the greatest miracle of this time.

His eyes were deep and quiet, and he fixedly looked at Jiang Suizhou. However, Jiang Suizhou was completely absorbed, and his eyes locked only on the files in his hand.

After a long time, he put the last memorial back.

“Apart from these, is there something else going on?” He looked up and asked Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu didn’t return to his senses, and it took a long time before he answered, “What?”

Jiang Suizhou repeated patiently.

Huo Wujiu’s eyebrows jumped, but he asked without blinking an eye, “Why are you asking this?”

Jiang Suizhou sighed.

“How can these things alone make you so angry that you lost your temper?” he said.

Huo Wujiu didn’t know how Jiang Suizhou understood him so well. This kind of understanding was naturally quite pleasing to him, but it was a bit annoying when he was trying to hide something.

—— *Just a tiny bit.*

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Chapter 175

Huo Wujiu didn’t say anything for a while, which in Jiang Suizhou’s eyes was tacit approval.

But despite his acquiescence, he still kept his mouth shut.

Jiang Suizhou’s expression darkened in an instant.

He had endured several days in a row, until now. He couldn’t restrain himself anymore.

There was a big mess in the palace, and now the world was also in chaos. But Huo Wujiu kept hiding everything from him, forbidding him to know, as if to strictly protect him under his wings.

He knew Huo Wujiu’s intentions, but he didn’t want it.

He had read so many history books and knew how stormy a change of a dynasty was. This was not something someone could bear alone, and he didn’t want Huo Wujiu to shoulder everything by himself.

He obviously could work together with Huo Wujiu, but he wouldn’t let him.

He tolerated it for several days in a row until he was better off and was able to walk. Only then did he catch Huo Wujiu in the act. He wanted all the proof with him, so Huo Wujiu could no longer deny it.

But at this moment, Huo Wujiu was still hiding things from him and didn’t want him to know.

Jiang Suizhou pursed his lips, quietly looked at Huo Wujiu, but did not speak.

Huo Wujiu immediately sensed that something was wrong.

“What’s wrong?” He asked anxiously, reaching out to touch Jiang Suizhou again.

Jiang Suizhou, however, knocked his hand aside.

His strength was puny, but it was something Huo Wujiu couldn’t withstand.

“Huo Wujiu,” Jiang Suizhou’s voice sounded withdrawn. “If you like me, you should be honest.”

Huo Wujiu immediately panicked.

“No, I didn’t mean to lie to you. It’s just these things…” He was stuck.

It was just that these matters were terrible, so much that he couldn’t figure them out himself. He had no idea what to do, let alone let Jiang Suizhou worry about it.

He was… reluctant, thoroughly unwilling to do so.

Jiang Suizhou asked, “What is it?”

His voice was so cold that Huo Wujiu couldn’t stand it.

He gritted his teeth, fished out the letter hidden in the crack on the desk, and shoved it into Jiang Suizhou’s hand as if facing death unflinchingly.

“It’s not a big deal,” he was still talking tough.

Jiang Suizhou lowered his eyes and opened the letter.

The letter was written in vermilion pen, and the top was stamped with the imperial seal of Emperor Zhao Yuan.

The letter was written with great care, and even the concern and joy were beyond words. Emperor Zhaoyuan was glad that Huo Wujiu had not lost his legs and that he had recovered, but he also blamed him for not letting him

know earlier and for not returning to the court immediately. Now that Huo Wujiu was said to be responsible for the destruction of Southern Jing, Emperor Zhao Yuan was even happier. He only asked how Huo Wujiu planned to settle down and how he would reward him generously.

Emperor Zhaoyuan was in very poor health, but the letter was written in a thick and eloquent manner. At the end of the letter, it was even vaguely visible that he couldn't hold the pen. The handwriting was shaky, but he kept writing.

Jiang Suizhou finished reading the letter quietly and put it away.

"So, it's because of this letter that you are unhappy, isn't it?" Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu replied sullenly, reaching out to take the letter away.

His evasive appearance was clearly playing the ostrich.

Jiang Suizhou's hand dodged to the side, allowing Huo Wujiu to grab the empty air.

"You should have known you'd have to face this." Jiang Suizhou said, "That's why you heavily guarded Southern Jing, but didn't do anything else, right?"

Huo Wujiu said nothing

Jiang Suizhou knew that for him, this was an extremely difficult choice.

After a moment of silence, he sighed and raised his hand to cover the back of Huo Wujiu's hand.

"In this letter, you also see something, right?" he asked.

Huo Wujiu remained silent, but held Jiang Suizhou's hand with his other hand.

Jiang Suizhou silently returned his grip.

He had some suspicions, and today's letter confirmed them.

If Emperor Zhao Yuan and Huo Yuyan were of one mind, then the throne and the Crown Prince position would both belong to them. Huo Yuyan wouldn't have been so worried about his personal gains and losses and risked having private dealings with enemy ministers just to get Huo Wujiu killed.

If Emperor Zhao Yuan also wanted Huo Wujiu to die, then Huo Yuyan would not have had to go to such great lengths.

Now, in all likelihood, Emperor Zhao Yuan was unaware of Huo Yuyan's actions.

Huo Wujiu gnashed his teeth and said under his breath.

"The father and son did not negotiate well," he said. "Whether they want my life or not, they should let me know exactly."

His tone was fierce, but Jiang Suizhou could hear the sadness in it.

Huo Yuyan and Emperor Zhao Yuan were both father and son. If they were both unkind and unrighteous, Huo Wujiu could have immediately commanded his troops north and turned against them, but Emperor Zhao Yuan was still a loving uncle to him.

He couldn't do so, so he was forced into a dilemma instead.

Jiang Suizhou gently shook his hand.

"I do have an idea." He said, "No matter what, we can solve the present dilemma first."

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and looked at him, "What can we do?"

Jiang Suizhou looked at him quietly for a while, and when he spoke again, the direction of the conversation had already changed.

“I can tell you.” His eyes were a bit unyielding, and he gave Huo Wujiu a look. “But you have to promise me, don’t hide anything from me from now on.”

Huo Wujiu lowered his head and did not speak.

He didn’t know how to love someone yet. He only knew how to give him the best and stop the worst for him.

If there was such an unpleasant matter again, his choice would definitely not change.

Jiang Suizhou continued, “I know your intentions, but I also like you. You can not deprive me of the right to bear the storm for you.”

Huo Wujiu’s heart shook.

He looked at Jiang Suizhou without a moment’s hesitation.

It had never occurred to him that he needed someone’s protection, let alone need to rely on someone. Everyone taught him to be independent and strong, but Jiang Suizhou was the only one who gently told him he could bear the storms for him.

He couldn’t control the wild beating of his heart.

Huo Wujiu’s heart was burning so badly that the veins on the back of his hands bulged. He moved his lips and was about to speak, but heard Jiang Suizhou open his mouth again.

“What’s more, you’re still my concubine. You have to listen to whatever I say, and you’re not allowed to lie to me.”

Huo Wujiu’s complexion drastically changed.

The next moment, the sky spun.

Jiang Suizhou blinked and saw blossoms before his eyes. He felt a twinge of pain at his waist the moment someone picked up and pressed him on the

imperial desk.

Simultaneously, Huo Wujiu’s voice between gnashed teeth rang out above his head.

“Who are you calling a concubine?”

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and found a shadow cast in front of him.

Underneath the shadow were Huo Wujiu’s ferocious eyes, glaring at him ravenously.

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Chapter 176

Jiang Suizhou took a breath and quickly stretched his hands to push him: “Stop making trouble!”

Huo Wujiu, however, did not listen to him and pressed him tightly on the desk.

“I’m asking you. Who is your concubine?” Huo Wujiu argued pointlessly.

This little rabbit somehow learned the skill of touching his sore spot. Also, he specialized in picking the time when someone was so touched, then pouring cold water at him accurately.

He was fuming, but Jiang Suizhou felt amused instead.

“You were originally a concubine.” He said solemnly, “You were brought in through the side door of the Prince’s residence, and wasn’t let in through the main door — It’s only been a few months. How could you forget it?”

Huo Wujiu pressed him down and wanted to bite him.

Jiang Suizhou swiftly dodged. For a while, both their breaths were messed up.

Gradually, the two men’s breathing became heavier. Since Huo Wujiu was pinning him down, their bodies rubbed against each other.

At such a time, there would most likely be some unspoken reactions.

Jiang Suizhou perceived a raging inferno almost immediately. He looked up and saw Huo Wujiu’s dark eyes half squinting, looking deeply at him. The fire that Jiang Suizhou felt was also burning in Huo Wujiu’s eyes.

Behind him, the imperial study was solemn, and the coiled dragon on the golden Pillar had its eyes wide open with a serious look.

Jiang Suizhou was startled and quickly raised his hand to push Huo Wuiu.

It wasn't that easy to push Huo Wujiu away, unless he himself was willing.

The more Jiang Suizhou pushed, the tighter Huo Wujiu pinned him down. Jiang Suizhou couldn't resist and his back was gradually pressed against the piles of documents on the imperial desk.

A moment later, Huo Wujiu released him while gasping for breath. When he looked at him again, his dark eyes were already flaming hot.

Huo Wujiu also realized that it was not Jiang Suizhou, but himself, who was tortured by pushing his luck.

He also remembered that Jiang Suizhou's injuries had not been fully healed, and he could not be tossed around.

He had no choice but to endure the fire that had just ignited and suppress it.

Huo Wujiu felt annoyed deep inside, but he showed no mercy at all. He clenched his teeth on Jiang Suizhou's ear, opened his mouth and bit him.

However, although his posture was pretty frightening, he bit Jiang Suizhou's ear and then gently soothed it with his hot breath. Jiang Suizhou, on the other hand, shrank, and almost all of his flesh and bones went numb.

"Didn't you say I'm a concubine?" Huo Wujiu gritted his teeth. "Why don't you let me be a concubine and serve the master now?"

…How vengeful.

Jiang Suizhou pushed his shoulder, and Huo Wujiu let him go reluctantly.

"You're not." Jiang Suizhou said helplessly, coaxing him rather perfunctorily. "You are the main wife and the princess consort, okay?"

Huo Wujiu sat back on the throne and fetched Jiang Suizhou back into his arms. Although he was still dissatisfied, he let him off the hook quite generously.

“That’s more like it.” He snorted coldly. If he were unaware of what they were talking about, he, like other bystanders, might have thought that he was serious, sitting in a camp and arranging the army.

Jiang Suizhou burst out laughing despite himself.

Huo Wujiu continued.

“Then you must not treat me perfunctorily,” he said. “The three letters and six etiquettes, and the imperial edict are all indispensable.”

——

Although Huo Wujiu was the most dictatorial person in the world, he always had a soft spot that forced him to do things more unexpectedly.

He might have been still reluctant to let Jiang Suizhou go out, but he could not stop him. After a day or two, he compromised.

The first thing Jiang Suizhou did when he got free was to go to the imperial study room, discuss with Huo Wujiu, and write a letter to Emperor Zhao Yuan.

Even if most of their conjectures were true, they still had to be careful. He asked Huo Wujiu to weigh his words, and write down the current situation of Southern Jing in the letter, saying that deploying the army at this juncture was critical. All matters of Southern Jing were in a mess. Therefore, he planned to stay in Southern Jing, settle down south of the Great River, and return to the court to report on the completion of his task later.

He also wrote in the letter that now was the time to employ people. The Southern Jing officials couldn’t be used, and Emperor Zhao Yuan needed to allocate manpower. Jiang Suizhou made a list of many officials, all of whom were ministers of the Northern Liang Dynasty. All of them were also

followers of Huo Wujiu and his father, and they could be regarded as members of their faction.

Jiang Suizhou skillfully made the list, ranging from the late Marquis's aides and staff back then, to officials from all over the country who surrendered to Huo Wujiu before Emperor Zhao Yuan became emperor, and several courtiers whose names Huo Wujiu couldn't even remember. Huo Wujiu was stunned.

"How do you know so much?" Huo Wujiu sat beside him and couldn't help but express his surprise.

Jiang Suizhou gave him a passing glance.

Of course he was well versed. Not to mention what camp they were part of now, Jiang Suizhou knew everything including the number of children they would have in the future, what age they would die, and what they would achieve.

After he finished writing the list, he checked it over carefully and confirmed that these people were trustworthy and that there were some forces in Northern Liang. Then, he handed the list to Huo Wujiu and asked him to transcribe it.

"In this way, you can more or less test your uncle's intentions." Jiang Suizhou said, "Again, this move is both advancing and retreating in a game of chess. From here onwards, you can see how to proceed."

This list was sent to Emperor Zhao Yuan desk, and Huo Wujiu's intent was written on the paper as clear as noonday —— He had beaten Southern Jing and was employing the officials under him to govern.

If Emperor Zhao Yuan trusted him, he would just assume that he knew these people and was willing to appoint them. If he didn't, he would immediately believe that he wanted all of Southern Jing to be under his power. He would never disagree with Huo Wujiu being so powerful.

When that happened, they would both stand on opposite sides. At this point, Huo Wujiu had an army and territories, plus the people in Southern Jing. At this juncture, he had an army and could stand on his own. Even worse came to worst and he cut off ties with Northern Liang, they would each govern their own territory.

As for what name the state would be…

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Chapter 177

If Huo Wujiu was willing to establish himself as the Emperor, it was naturally the best; if he had a knot in his heart, Jiang Suizhou wouldn’t mind being the new Emperor who viciously murdered and seized the throne. He would govern a state for Huo Wujiu and be his backing.

After all, things had reached this point, so there was no longer the need to care about the course of history.

When Jiang Suizhou was lying sick these days, he had been mulling over this matter. Since he transmigrated here, he had become a butterfly flapping its wings, reversing the original history around a corner. Now, everything had long changed from the original timeline.

He knew that history must be respected, but now that he was here, he felt that the people in history today needed more respect.

He didn’t want to let the wicked continue to do evil, let the loyal officials and generals still end up badly, and let the people of the dawn suffer torment —— More importantly, he couldn’t just watch Huo Wujiu live like in his previous life, supporting his evil-hearted cousin as the Emperor, and going to Yangguan alone to guard a deserted place, where his most vivid and angry memories remained.

He wanted his beloved Huo Wujiu to be as reckless and bright as he had always been all his life.

That being the case, he had a lot of things to do. Since he was bent on doing it, he’d better carry it out to the end.

His thoughts only existed in his heart, and he did not tell Huo Wujiu. Huo Wujiu naturally knew nothing about it. At this time, he was holding a pen.

He was feeling impatient, but he forced himself to write the list of names one by one.

Jiang Suizhou watched quietly for a while, then while listening to his writing, Huo Wujiu spoke.

“When this is done, you should rest for a couple of days.” Huo Wujiu said. “There’s nothing more important. I can do it all.”

Jiang Suizhou, however, gave him a look.

“Not everything is over yet,” he countered, “Don’t try to lock me up.”

Huo Wujiu was totally helpless. Although he was not at ease or happy, he dared not voice it out. He could only vent his temper on Li Changning, blaming him for the mediocre effect of the medicine he prescribed, which made Jiang Suizhou still unwell.

Li Changning knew best how difficult it was for a person stuck in love. Hence, when listening to Huo Wujiu’s reproach, he just treated it as a gust of wind blowing past his ears.

It was only after Huo Wujiu left that he whispered to Wei Kai.

“If a canine is emotionally unstable, always tearing objects and howling for no reason, that is a sign of courtship,” he said.

Wei Kai didn’t understand: “What did you say?”

Li Changning smiled lightly and meaningfully.

“Nothing,” he said. “I’m just telling you. Not only can I cure people, but I also know something about animal diseases.”

——

Jiang Suizhou had compiled a list of all the officials in and outside the capital in the past few days.

Some of them were dauntless, but they were extremely capable. He found all of them. He used either power to coerce them or lured them with benefits, and then let Huo Wujiu's soldiers and officers keep them under strict supervision. In this manner, they took over the affairs of each county in succession.

With the dispatch of these officials, Huo Wujiu was able to gradually withdraw his troops, and all his soldiers were evacuated outside the city for defense. After a few days, Southern Jing was gradually restored to its original order.

After all, for the people, the role of parental officials was much greater than that of the Emperor. As long as someone was sitting in the government office under the blue sky, the one in the throne room didn't matter.

And the same was true in Lin'an City. The officials of various ministries gradually returned to their positions under Jiang Suizhou's selection. They were frightened by Huo Wujiu these days, and felt in danger. However, with Jiang Suizhou's presence again, most of the officials found a backbone and gradually returned to the imperial court.

The only ones left who were not dispatched were either the core members of Pang's faction or the old ministers of Southern Jing under Qi Min's party.

For Qi Min, Jiang Suizhou was a little reluctant to give him up.

He knew that Qi Min was talented, highly respected, and was killed in history under Pang Shao's might. He couldn't bear the country to be without Qi Min. What was more, now that people in the dynasty were on tenterhooks, he also needed Qi Min to take a post.

After dealing with the important matters, he personally went to Qi Min's residence.

He hadn't fully recovered. Too much movement would render him ashen-faced again. Huo Wujiu did not agree with him leaving the palace, but he could not stop him, so he finally followed him and got on the carriage to Qi's residence.

The Minister of Ceremonies' manor was currently heavily guarded.

When Jiang Suizhou got off the carriage and entered the residence, he found that the people in the manor were silent and did not dare to raise their heads.

However, although the Qi Manor was lifeless, it was still in order, so it is clear that Huo Wujiu wasn't treating them harshly. He was keeping a tight rein on them, though.

Jiang Suizhou, together with Huo Wujiu, went straight into Qi Min's courtyard under the guidance of a servant.

The courtyard was very simple, with a small courtyard full of sycamores. When Jiang Suizhou stepped up the stairs, Huo Wujiu walked forward before him, pushing the door for him, and holding his arm with one hand.

His action was quite domineering and brooked no opposition. However, every one of his actions exuded caution, like a dragon guarding his treasure.

Jiang Suizhou just let him be and went into Qi Min's bedroom.

Qi Min was now sitting under the closed window, holding a text in his hand.

When he heard the sound of the door and footsteps, he didn't lift his head. He just let a servant quietly flip to another page of the book and gently asked, "General Huo, having kept this old man for so many days, can you finally not hold back?"

After saying that, he put the book down on the table.

"If you're here to persuade this old man to submit, then you can return by all means. If you want my life, then you are free to take it."

He finished speaking and raised his eyes, looking toward the door.

Then, his calmness and composure, as if he was facing death with no regrets, froze on his face.

“Your Highness Jingwang?” He immediately stood up and was about to speak, but then looked behind Jiang Suizhou.

The two people, who were supposedly incompatible as fire and water, and couldn’t live under the same air, were standing side by side. The rebel general Huo Wujiu, who killed the Emperor, was even supporting His Highness Jingwang with one hand and with extreme caution, as if he was protecting some fragile treasure.

Qi Min’s gaze bounced between the two for a few moments, and his tongue somehow failed him.

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Chapter 178

Qi Min was speechless, but Jiang Suizhou stepped forward, stopped in front of him, nodded with a light smile and greeted, “Qi-daren.”

Qi Min’s gaze paused on him and Huo Wujiu for a moment before he sat up straight and spoke, “… Your Highness, please have a seat.”

Jiang Suizhou responded and sat down on the chair in front of Qi Min.

“I’m here today to discuss some matters with Qi-daren,” Jiang Suizhou started warmly.

Qi Min stayed silent for a moment and said, “I have heard some rumors these days. I did not want to believe them initially, but now it seems that the rumors are true.”

Jiang Suizhou roughly knew what he was talking about.

Huo Wujiu had now occupied the imperial city. The Emperor was dead, but nobody knew if he, Jingwang, was alive or dead. The imperial palace was not some off-the-beaten-path mountain range, so people’s lives and deaths were always clear.

Since his death was unknown, then he must be alive.

Everyone knew how complicated the relationship between Jingwang and Huo Wujiu was. Now that Huo Wujiu was in power, he detained Jingwang, but didn’t kill him. Of course, the reason behind this was quite worthy of scrutiny.

Jiang Suizhou guessed it, so when faced with Qi Min’s questioning, he was frank.

“If rumors have it that General Huo saved me from the fire, then the rumors are true,” Jiang Suizhou said frankly.

Qi Min stared at him for a moment.

“So, all the arrangements in the capital and outside the capital these days were also your idea, right?”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

“Are you here today, also to persuade me on Huo Wujiu’s behalf?” Qi Min asked right after.

Jiang Suizhou still did not deny it.

He knew that Qi Min was broad-minded in his words and deeds, so he was not in a position to beat around the bush with him.

Seeing his acquiescence, Qi Min let out a deep sigh.

“I knew it. Such a thing was not something he, Huo Wujiu, could do.” He said, “But, Your Highness, I originally thought that you were thorough and understanding, but now it seems that you are very muddled.”

When Huo Wujiu, who was next to Jiang Suizhou heard this, he felt that he was such a nag and unpleasant to the ears. He clicked his tongue in annoyance.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes and glanced at him.

When their eyes met, Huo Wujiu froze, somewhat unconvinced. However, he still pursed his lips and heavily tilted his head to the side.

He promised Jiang Suizhou before they took the trip today that he would not clash with Qi Min.

Jiang Suizhou withdrew his gaze and looked at Qi Min again.

“What makes you say that, Qi-daren?” he asked.

The silent exchange between him and Huo Wujiu just now, even if it was subtle, had not escaped Qi Min's eyes. When Qi Min looked at him again, his gaze was a bit complicated. He paused for a moment before speaking in a deep voice, "Your Highness, family and country should not be confused with personal feelings."

Jiang Suizhou retorted bluntly, "But this Prince did not make these decisions because of personal feelings. Likewise, this Prince has come to ask you to return to the court today, also not because of personal feelings."

"Then what's your reason for doing so?" The volume of Qi Min's voice rose a bit.

Jiang Suizhou sat there with a calm and honest expression.

"This Prince did it for my own sake," he replied. "The reason I came to persuade you is for the imperial court."

"The imperial court?" Qi Min smiled instead of getting angry. "Your Highness, where is the imperial court today? If you tell me at this time that you are about to ascend to the throne as Emperor, then this old man has an imperial court. If you're not, then where is this humble servant's imperial court?"

Speaking of this, he changed his tone, "You're no different, you know? The late Emperor turned his back on you, while Pang Shao was arbitrary and despotic, but the great kingdom still exists. This is your home and my country. Now that you have ruined your own country, why have you not destroyed your home? Now, why are you rushing to persuade this old man to join you and serve the Huo family's court?!"

When he reached this point, he became a little emotional and coughed violently.

After a moment, he stopped coughing and said under his breath, "A good woman does not serve two husbands, and a good minister does not serve two masters. Your Highness, the one standing behind you today is Huo Wujiu, so you don't have to waste your breath. Please go back."

After Jiang Suizhou listened to him, he stayed silent for a moment, and then stood up.

“Then this Prince will not bother Qi-daren,” he said, “But since you have nothing to do in your spare time, there are some trivial matters that you can think about.”

Qi Min looked up at him.

“If a woman is entrusted to someone else, must she waste her life for an unrighteous man? When a good minister hasn’t met a wise master, will he watch the lands of his country suffer in utter misery, even if he is visionary? Is this his loyalty?”

Qi Min didn’t speak.

Jiang Suizhou continued, “As far as I am concerned, women don’t have to preserve their chastity after the death of their husband. Since men cherish time and want to build a successful career through meritorious accomplishments, then women should not waste their time in vain either, and just be worthy of their desires. Ministers, above all, should not tie themselves to a certain dynasty, a certain Emperor. If this so-called loyalty is to bind yourself to a sinking ship, then forget it.”

After his speech, he took a step back.

“If Daren’s heart wants to repay the Great Jing and the late Emperor, then this Prince will never persuade you again. But if your heart is for the people of the world, then you only need to be loyal to the people of the world. You don’t have to care about what kind of person is sitting on the throne.”

His gaze was calm but firm.

“Just like me, my home and country are just a vast land I’m stepping on right now. It’s a state under the sky, and it has nothing to do with anyone else.”

——

Huo Wujiu was silent on the way back.

Jiang Suizhou asked, “What are you thinking about?”

Huo Wujiu turned his head and looked deeply at him for a spell.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Suizhou was puzzled.

Huo Wujiu leaned over and embraced him quite naturally into his arms.

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Chapter 179

“I was just thinking. I used to hate listening to civil officials argue,” he said, “With literary jargons here and there, they just draw some poor, pedantic bird crap. I can’t understand a thing. Moreover, they quarrel and splatter spittles everywhere. I might as well go listen to a monk’s chanting.”

Jiang Suizhou smiled and burst out laughing.

Huo Wujiu continued, “But why is it different today?”

Jiang Suizhou looked at him with a smile on his face: “What’s the difference today?”

Huo Wujiu was serious.

“I just keep thinking. How could I have such a good eye?” he said.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyebrows and waited for him to say more.

Huo Wujiu, however, didn’t go any further.

He had always felt that human bones were shaped by external factors. The bones of these stinky soldiers were all made of iron, with a cool, icy iron smell; the bones of those literary ministers were shaped by the endless poems and essays. They smell like books and ink, but to Huo Wujiu, they smelled like a pile of rotten books.

Only Jiang Suizhou was different.

He obviously should be no different from others, a young master amidst a beautiful pile of wealth and nobility, that Huo Wujiu was exposed to.

But Jiang Suizhou seemed to be molded in light and freedom.

Upright, forthright, and transparent like no one around him.

His aura was so attractive, drawing people toward him, like a moth flying toward the flame. Even if you were to crash and turn into ashes and bones, you would still yourself at the light and try to embrace the warm light.

Huo Wujiu thought and did so.

He lowered his head and kissed Jiang Suizhou’s lips fervently.

——

After a few days, a major event happened in the capital.

The residence of the Minister of Ceremonies was heavily guarded, but the guards were all withdrawn. On the next day, Qi-daren, the former dynasty’s Minister of Ceremonies, stepped out of his residence in a grand manner, got on a carriage and entered the palace.

On the same day, Qi-daren was promoted by a half a rank and became the new Chief Minister, commanding all the civil ministers in the south of the Chang River.

This incident not only shocked the court and the public, but also the people inside and outside Lin’an City, who caught wind of it. For a time, both the courtiers and the common people understood one thing —— Huo Wujiu, who led soldiers to kill the Emperor and burn the palace, was not a bad conqueror. Although he killed the Emperor, he did not hurt the people and courtiers. He even used them and appointed them in high positions.

At the same time, the few Southern Jing officials, who were still on edge, calmed down to some extent —— Even if Huo Wujiu had plans of killing someone after making use of them, he would never dare to kill the highly respected Qi Min. Now that Qi Min had become the same as them, then Huo Wujiu most likely had no intention of killing them.

For a time, everyone settled down.

However, a lot of talk arose about Qi Min, but they were varying opinions. Some said that he received Huo Wujiu's approval, and some said that he was disloyal and unrighteous.

However, no matter how everyone guessed, only Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu knew what Qi Min really thought.

When Qi Min entered the palace that day, he went to the imperial study to meet Jiang Suizhou.

"The world is so big that there is no shortage of old and useless skeletons like me." Qi Min said to Jiang Suizhou, "But with the turbulent situation at present, you can use me, and I am willing to help you."

Jiang Suizhou said, "Qi-daren is very righteous."

However, Qi Min raised his hand and interrupted him.

"This old and useless man just doesn't want to die, feeling ashamed in front of the common people under the state." He said, "However, the day the world is pacified, may I also ask Your Highness not to forcibly let me stay and allow me to resign from office and return home."

Jiang Suizhou responded, "This Prince will not force you, Daren. Everything is up to you."

This time, all the officials inside and outside Lin'an were finally completed. Now that someone was appointed to lead them, the imperial court of Souther Jing was finally put on the right track.

Although this situation wasn't sustainable, everything was finally sorted out. With Qi Min's assistance, the number of documents sent to the imperial desk also drastically decreased. Jiang Suizhou had been busy for a while, but at this time he was finally able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Huo Wujiu was also relieved at last.

Whenever he saw how frail Jiang Suizhou was against a gust of wind, but was still busy all day long, he was so anxious and annoyed. However, he

couldn’t stop him.

Now that the messy business was over, he could rightfully carry Jiang Suizhou and let him rest for a while, right?

Huo Wujiu finally felt at ease both physically and mentally. In a good mood, he even went to inspect the army outside the city.

As a result, before his happiness could last two hours, he heard that Jiang Suizhou, who had returned to his bedchamber, had changed his clothes and left his room again.

This time, the direction he went to was the imperial prison in Lin’an.

What kind of place was that? It was bloody, gloomy and full of dampness.

Huo Wujiu immediately abandoned the business in his hands and rushed there, stopping Jiang Suizhou in the middle of the road.

“Where are you going?” Huo Wujiu looked worried.

Jiang Suizhou replied honestly, “I heard that you had Pang Shao locked up in the imperial prison, so I’m planning to go and visit him.”

Huo Wujiu’s eyebrows knitted up: “Have you recovered well enough to go to that kind of cold place?”

Jiang Suizhou replied, “Now that everything has come to an end, it is time to give him a relief.”

Huo Wujiu fell silent.

He knew that for someone like Pang Shao, death was the best relief. On that day, he killed Jiang Shunheng on the spot on impulse, but there were still many scores to be settled.

Therefore, he delayed the time without letting Pang Shao die and pour all the blame on him.

Presently, they hadn’t settled the score yet.

When Jiang Suizhou saw his expression, he guessed what he was thinking more or less.

He raised his hand and held Huo Wujiu’s tight arm.

“For him, there is no better punishment than to let him die for good,” he said.

“But you…”

“If you’re ill at ease, why don’t you go with me?”

This time, Huo Wujiu did not refuse.

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Chapter 180

The Imperial Prison was not as gloomy and cold as the Imperial Dungeon in the Palace, but it was also the place where felons were detained in the capital.

Since Pang Shao entered this place, he had not lived in peace. Huo Wujiu's soldiers had been trained, and they were best at torturing prisoners of war.

They let Pang Shao suffer bone-chilling pain all day long, but also let him hang onto his consciousness and breath. Hence, he was awake all day, and never passed out, let alone die.

Pang Shao had no idea how many days had already passed.

Upon entering the prison, the stench of blood blew onto their faces. Huo Wujiu frowned in displeasure. Then, when they were approaching the cell, he held Jiang Suizhou's shoulder.

"Wait a minute," he said.

Jiang Suizhou was clueless, but still stopped in his tracks.

Huo Wujiu strode forward, approached the cell door and took a look. Then he frowned unhappily as if he had seen something unclean.

Afterward, he raised his hand, and several soldiers came forward.

The soldiers were busy for a while. Huo Wujiu retreated, naturally took Jiang Suizhou's hand and led him inside.

Jiang Suizhou followed him and entered, then turned a corner, facing the cell where Pang Shao was held captive. The bloody smell was too distinct.

When Jiang Suizhou looked inside, he saw Pang Shao sitting askew on a haystack in the corner of the cell. His shoulders were drooping, and a piece of cloth was his only cover.

Meanwhile, there was already an empty chair placed at the door of the cell, with soldiers lined up behind.

“This is…” Jiang Suizhou looked at Pang Shao, and then at Huo Wujiu, and asked in confusion.

Huo Wujiu faintly replied, “It’s nothing. Just sit.”

Needless to say, he was afraid that the person who had executed the torture would look terrible and dirty Jiang Suizhou’s eyes.

He had witnessed a lot of them himself, not to mention that Pang Shao had been held in prison for a whole month. He knew all too well what a filthy place this was, and what a miserable sight a tortured person looked.

He had been exposed to countless one, so he could treat it as air. Even eating while interrogating prisoners was not a problem to him.

But what kind of person was Jiang Suizhou? He was the cleanest and the most timid white rabbit in his heart.

Even if Jiang Suizhou was not as courageous as he thought, he didn’t want him to see such a thing.

Hearing this, Jiang Suizhou glanced at Huo Wujiu and then at Pang Shao.

At this moment, Pang Shao’s gloomy eyes were locked on him. With blood oozing from the cloth on his body, it was clear at a glance that Huo Wujiu was covering up something.

Jiang Suizhou did not contradict Huo Wujiu, but just let him lead the way. He sat down in the chair.

“Pang-daren,” he said, “How have you been?”

Pang Shao laughed, his voice horribly hoarse.

“Are you satisfied?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou, however, slowly shook his head.

“It’s this Prince’s turn to ask you. Pang-daren, are you satisfied with what has happened so far?”

Pang Shao laughed coldly. His raspy voice smacked of an evil ghost crawling out of hell.

“Being framed by you to this point, I am naturally satisfied beyond belief,” he replied.

But Jiang Suizhou gently smiled and said, “Daren, do you still not understand now? The one who caused you this is not this Prince, but you yourself.”

Pang Shao looked daggers at him.

Jiang Suizhou was totally undaunted. He calmly continued, “Wasn’t it you who sent Huo Wujiu to this Prince’s manor? Wasn’t it you who pushed this Prince to the brink of death step by step, forcing me to fight back? Daren, everything I have done, everything Huo Wujiu has done, is all thanks to you. Everything you have done has just backfired on you.”

Pang Shao, however, argued, “What a cunning tongue you have. Now that things have reached this point, you’re still saying this. Aren’t you afraid that after death, I will come to claim your life?”

Huo Wujiu made a discontented tsk sound and stepped forward to open the cell, as if he wanted to rush in to punish him.

Jiang Suizhou grabbed him and yanked him back.

He clearly could not drag Huo Wujiu, but he paused, and still obediently retreated.

“Are you just going to let him talk nonsense?” Huo Wujiu gnashed his teeth.

“A person who is guilty of monstrous crimes can’t turn into a malevolent ghost to demand somebody’s life,” Jiang Suizhou said indifferently. “Now, I am only claiming your life on behalf of the people you killed.”

He looked at Pang Shao and then added.

“You should know how much money is piled up in your coffers, right? You have a clear inventory about those silver, but what about the people you killed? Do you know?” he asked. “If you don’t, this Prince can count them for you. Can you count those in the court who disobeyed you, the ministers who stood in your way, the people who were displaced because of your corruption, and the refugees who starved to death in the locust plague because of your greed?”

Pang Shao sneered.

“Do you still need to count the number of ants crushed to death?”

“That’s why you were caught and detained here for so long, with no one to voice your grievances, and no one to rescue you, only lackeys dispersing when you fell from power,” Jiang Suizhou said softly.

“Oh, there may still be,” Jiang Suizhou changed his words. “The late emperor, Jiang Shunheng, isn’t he an ant? He’d been waiting for you to return to save him until death. He believed in you until he died that you’re the uncle he could rely on the most.”

Only then did Pang Shao’s gaze flickered.

Jiang Suizhou surveyed him quietly.

Even though he felt that Jiang Shunheng was a bit pathetic, Pang Shao was a consummate bastard. This bastard had no compassion and shame. The only way to really drive him to grief was to let him personally hear how his building was collapsing.

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Chapter 181

“Even if I have done so many things to sow discord between you two, he still kept in mind your false display of affection back in the day and trusted you wholeheartedly.” Jiang Suizhou narrated, “Did you not rely on him for your great power, innumerable gold, silver and wealth, all thanks to his stupidity? It’s just a pity that you were paranoid enough to think he was so smart and wanted to pull him off the throne. It was then that you gave this Prince an opportunity to take advantage of. Had you not been so suspicious of him, Daren, who do you think can pull you down from your position as the Chief Minister?”

Having said that, Jiang Suizhou stood up and said lightly.

“Think carefully before you die, Daren. In the whole world, there is no better person to cheat than Jiang Shunheng. The one who pushed him out of the throne and put the knife on your neck, hasn’t it always been you?”

After saying that, he turned around and walked out.

The rest of the people filed out, and all four corners fell quiet.

Pang Shao stared closely at the void in front of him.

“Stupid,” he spoke in a contemptuous but cold voice.

With this word, he was naturally scolding Jiang Shunheng. Over the past years, he had scolded Jiang Shunheng like this many times in his heart and behind his back, simply because he was just too stupid.

But this time, what emerged before his eyes was Jiang Shunheng’s appearance when he was a child.

He was around eight years old child, fat as a ball, and looked a little stupid. But as a child, he was more or less still quite childish and cute.

He was timid, but his eyes were bright when he looked at him. He sounded a little foolish when he spoke, but he never bothered him when he asked, “Uncle, when will you next visit me?”

Such a child would always be remembered occasionally and stuffed with candy for him to eat.

Really stupid. He’d been a fool all his life, yet even in his thirties, he was still an idiot who couldn’t read people well.

He deserved to be used.

Pang Shao lowered his eyes and restrained the faint sourness at the tip of his nose.

Just then, he heard footsteps.

Pang Shao took a look, but saw that it was Huo Wujiu who had returned.

Huo Wujiu stood in front of the cell and stared at him coldly.

“Behold,” Huo Wujiu said, “I am the one who harmed you, and it is also I who killed you. What can a sickly child with no strength to bind a chicken do? Only I can kill you whenever I want.”

Pang Shao frowned, not knowing what he was talking about.

Huo Wujiu gave him another icy glare.

“So, even if you have the ability to turn into a malevolent ghost, have a clear look,” he said. “If you want to ask for someone’s life, don’t take the wrong one.”

After saying that, he turned around and swaggered away.

It was only after a moment did Pang Shao realize what he meant.

So, Huo Wujiu was afraid that he would really turn into a malevolent ghost and find Jiang Suizhou. Hence, he made a special trip to warn him?

Pang Shao thought it was ridiculous.

He, Huo Wujiu, had been fighting in the battlefield for so many years and had committed so many sins, but still believed in ghosts and gods?

He has really gotten a lot dumber.

Pang Shao was totally amused. He laughed, but couldn't laugh any longer.

He could see Huo Wujiu's cautiousness toward that sickly Jiang Suizhou. He also realized that his warning was not for fear of ghosts, but for fear of ghosts haunting Jiang Suizhou.

It seemed that emotion was the thing that could deceive people's minds the most.

Be it love or affection, the most illusory things had the most destructive power.

He thought of Jiang Shunheng again.

He remembered that in a moment of desperation at that time and to dispatch the army, he let Jiang Shunheng know that he had contacts with Huo Yuyan. Jiang Shunheng didn't pursue the matter at all. Instead, after giving the tiger tally to him, he asked him, "Uncle, you'll always protect me no matter what, right?"

Of course he wouldn't. However, it didn't necessarily escape Jiang Shunheng's notice.

It was just that he was still the stupid kid who never saw his father all year round and only waited for one or two sweets in his uncle's sleeve.

———

When Huo Wujiu came out of the imperial prison that day, he said he forgot something and went back inside. However, he brought nothing when he returned. Jiang Suizhou asked him what he wanted to do, Huo Wujiu refused to say anything. He looked as if it was something disgraceful.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t pursue it.

Within a few days, Pang Shao died.

He had been famous during his entire lifetime, but died without any commotion. Now that Huo Wujiu wielded power in Southern Jing, the members of Pang Shao’s faction couldn’t wait to curry favor with him. How could they bother to pay attention to their old master’s life or death?

Jiang Suizhou was really idle.

With Qi Min around, most of the affairs could be handled by the court officials themselves. Jiang Suizhou only needed to make decisions on the matters sent to the imperial desk. He originally only needed to be busy for two or three hours a day, but Huo Wujiu also preferred to sift through all the matters sent to him before dealing with military affairs. If Huo Wujiu was capable of making the right decision, he wouldn’t let Jiang Suizhou intervene.

Jiang Suizhou became more relaxed.

However, neither he nor Huo Wujiu knew that from the time they went to the prison together that day, a rumor had been spreading in the army.

Everyone in the army said that the General was somehow raising a pretty boy in the palace.

Rumors had it that the General was moved because his little pretty boy was really beautiful; it was also said that the General was infected by his encounter in Jingwang Manor.

So on and so forth.

The wind drifted into the ears of many high-ranking officers, many of whom especially worshiped Huo Wujiu. They felt resentful, but could not vent their anger.

Until a certain day.

There was a certain Wan Hu in the army, and he had some important military affairs to report to General Huo today. So he entered the palace and marched straight to the imperial study.

However, when he entered the room, he found a stranger sitting in front of the imperial desk instead of their General.

The man’s features were exquisite. The tips of his eyes were upturned, and there was a small red mole under his eyes. He was clearly a man, but was too stunning.

Wan Hu was awestruck.

Look at that beauty…Isn’t he the rumored pretty boy?!

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Chapter 182

Wan Hu was shocked, and his eyes turned into a look that one had when facing a formidable enemy.

Jiang Suizhou was totally oblivious to it.

He heard a report outside and thought it was some courtier who wanted to see him. He responded, having someone bring in the person who asked to see him, and then continued to read the memorial in his hand without raising his head.

He heard the sound of footsteps approaching, which stopped in front of the imperial desk. However, he did not hear the person speak.

Who was it?

Jiang Suizhou frowned. He raised his head to check the person out, and saw a soldier in armor. By the looks of his attire, he should be a high-ranking general.

He must have come for Huo Wujiu.

However, Huo Wujiu was busy searching and seizing Pang Shao's old base these two days. He was not in the palace at the moment. When Jiang Suizhou saw the General standing there, staring at him with a puzzled expression, he thought something big had happened outside the city, so he opened his mouth to ask.

But before he could question him, the general spoke up first.

"General Huo is not here, so you have the guts to sit here!"

The general looked cold and fierce. He was tall and powerful. Now that he was aggressive, his voice boomed like a resounding bell. When he opened his mouth, he scared Jiang Suizhou and made his shoulders tremble.

He sat up straight and met the general's gaze.

Jiang Suizhou was a little confused.

"What?" He asked.

The general sneered.

"The General must be really confused at the moment," he said. "You should also understand your status. Just because of the General's favor, you exceeded your authority. What? Do you still want to use such dirty means to fight for power and profit?"

Jiang Suizhou became more and more puzzled.

He raised his eyebrows, and was about to speak when he heard Meng Qianshan's displeased voice behind him. He took a step forward and snapped unhappily, "Who are you? How dare you behave atrociously here! Is nobody still coming…"

Jiang Suizhou raised his hand, blocking the rest of his words.

He snapped back to his senses and vaguely realized that the general had misunderstood something.

His identity was indeed a bit sensitive at present. He knew that people in the army were most afraid of instability, so no matter what chaos occurred in the middle of the imperial court, orders to the army must not be ambiguous. There must be a definite and sole leader.

Currently, Huo Wujiu was their leader, and Huo Yuyan of Northern Liang was standing against Huo Wujiu. Even Huo Wujiu's position in the army was not completely stable.

It was inconvenient for them to know that Jiang Suizhou was a remnant of the previous dynasty.

——In particular, Jiang Suizhou had a lot of real power in his hands.

For this reason, he had already told Huo Wujiu that it was best not to let everyone in the army know of his existence. He needed to wait until the big picture was settled before making plans.

Now the general in front of him most likely took him as a little boy toy that Huo Wujiu was keeping beside him.

“Then tell me, what’s my identity?” he asked. He put down the pen in his hand, propped his elbows on the desk curiously, and leaned forward.

He himself was unaware that whenever he smiled, the charm of his face would become extremely vivid.

The general immediately reacted as if he was greatly humiliated.

“Naturally, you’re General Huo’s plaything!” He snapped, “Since you know your identity, better get out of that position…”

“Who are you asking to get out?”

But at that moment, a deep voice sounded behind him.

Like a raging gale heralding a storm, the displeasure in that tone alone was unmistakable.

Huo Wujiu unexpectedly returned in time?

Jiang Suizhou was a little surprised. He raised his eyes and saw that the general, who was standing erect, also turned around hastily.

They both saw Huo Wujiu striding in with a gloomy face.

The general opened his mouth and was about to speak when his General stopped in front of him, with a look so cold that it could turn water into ice.

He knew that this was because he had scolded the General's boy toy and was caught in the act.

He was unlucky, so he resigned himself to his fate.

"I'm asking you a question," Huo Wujiu urged, with a voice squeezed out between his teeth.

When Huo Wujiu was upset, he was the most frightening. In particular, Jiang Suizhou was often scared to move. Although the general was unlike him, his frightened heart still trembled when he met those hostile and menacing eyes.

But at the same time, there was a wave of grief and anger that rose from his heart.

Although he was illiterate, he knew the tale of King You of Zhou and the princes of the beacon fire opera. From ancient times to the present, those unpromising men have always been bewitched by beauty, but it never occurred to them that their General could not escape this hurdle.

Grief and indignation could always spawn some righteous ardor in a loyal heart.

The general clenched her teeth as if defying death.

"He's just a clay rabbit. General, even if you dote on him, he shouldn't be allowed to interfere in government and military affairs!" He said stubbornly, "General, even if you kill this subordinate today, I haven't said anything wrong!"

Huo Wujiu's eyes were about to burst out with sparks of fire.

"Say it again, if you have the guts." Huo Wujiu gritted his teeth and lifted his collar.

Jiang Suizhou hurriedly stood up from the throne, walked to them quickly, and pulled Huo Wujiu's fist before it fell.

“Stop it.” Jiang Suizhou whispered, “He did it for your sake. I was just teasing him.”

After saying that, he smiled faintly, turned to the general who was waiting for Huo Wujiu to beat him, and explained in a warm voice, “General, please don’t mind it. I’m a nobody, so how can I recognize the things on the imperial desk? I was merely flipping over them out of boredom. If you have something to discuss, I will first…”

Huo Wujiu, whom he stopped, however, grabbed his wrist.

“Who are you calling General?” he asked Jiang Suizhou unhappily.

Jiang Suizhou was confused.

How come calling someone, General, was worth his jealousy?

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Chapter 183

Before he could speak, Huo Wujiu gripped the collar of the general, and shoved the tall and majestic general back several steps.

“Haven’t you been taught not to open your eyes and speak nonsense?” Huo Wujiu looked at the general and questioned fiercely.

“Take a look. He is Jingwang. I am his concubine, and he is my husband.”

The word ‘husband’ was loud and clear, and it made the general’s eyes widen.

Then, Huo Wujiu hugged Jiang Suizhou into his arms with just one hand.

“Since we’re married, not to mention the throne, even if I take over the world one day, it will all be his. You hear me?”

——

The general was momentarily stunned as if caught in a dream. Huo Wujiu’s statement also caught Jiang Suizhou off guard.

After the general withdrew, Jiang Suizhou anxiously dragged Huo Wujiu to the bedchamber behind the imperial study and said, “Why did you talk nonsense?”

Huo Wujiu’s remaining anger had not yet subsided, so he sat down on the couch and propped his hands on his knees: “Why do you think I was talking nonsense?”

Jiang Suizhou was in a sweat: “Didn’t I instruct you before? My identity…”

“I didn’t want to agree. It was you who forced me to.”

Huo Wujiu was now seething deep inside, so he also had no qualms in refuting Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou was speechless.

Huo Wujiu took a couple of breaths, reached out and dragged Jiang Suizhou into his embrace.

“All right, there’s nothing to worry about,” he comforted him.

“But…”

Then, Huo Wujiu turned to look at him.

“No buts,” he said. “Just tell me, do you believe me?”

Jiang Suizhou replied, “Of course, I do…”

Huo Wujiu interrupted him, “Then rest assured. Don’t be fooled when I’m being tough on them. One or a couple of them are my brothers who had gone through life and death with me. They won’t turn against me just because of such a petty thing. If you believe in me, you can only believe in them. Even if you were to die here with me today, they won’t turn around and join Huo Yuyan’s camp.

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment and nodded.

Huo Wujiu took out a letter from his sleeves and handed it to Jiang Suizhou.

“I came back just now for this,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou unfolded it and saw Emperor Zhao Yuan’s handwriting on it.

“Your uncle replied?” he asked.

Huo Wujiu hummed in response.

Jiang Suizhou read the letter carefully.

As expected, Emperor Zhao Yuan readily agreed to Huo Wujiu's proposal, and said that those people would head south in a few days, so Huo Wujiu should wait for them. He said that if there was anything else he wanted afterward, all he had to do was ask him.

After reading the letter, Jiang Suizhou asked Huo Wujiu, "Is it credible?"

Huo Wujiu nodded: "It was sent together with an imperial edict."

Jiang Suizhou sighed heavily when he heard the words.

"Since there is an imperial decree, it will be made known to the world. Those officials will become imperial envoys, and with this status, it's considered that you have your uncle's protection," he said. "As expected, only Huo Yuyan has a disloyal heart."

Huo Wujiu stayed silent for a moment, then he snorted inadvertently.

"He has always had a scheming heart since he was a kid," he said. "It's ridiculous he used it in a useless way."

He looked contemptuous, but Jiang Suizhou knew that he was not as detached as he appeared.

With this conclusion, he couldn't help but ask softly, "So what if you weren't in Southern Jing now?"

Huo Wujiu looked at him: "What do you mean?"

Jiang Suizhou recalled the end of Huo Wujiu's history.

He asked, "If at the moment Southern Jing hasn't perished, and there is no me; you are in Northern Liang and realized Huo Yuyan's thoughts, what would you do?"

Huo Wujiu didn't even hesitate for a second.

“To be honest, I’m too lazy to argue with him,” he said. “He likes to compete, but I’m not interested, so I would let him have his way. It’s just a throne. Just because he wants it, does he think everyone else wants it too?”

This was indeed something Huo Wujiu could do.

Jiang Suizhou was sighing in his heart when Huo Wujiu turned his gaze at him.

“However, this assumption is of little use.” He said, “Southern Jing has perished, and you are mine now. Even if I don’t want anything for myself, I have to fight for something for you. If he’s unhappy with me today and wants to kill me, what if he finds you detestable tomorrow? I can’t give him that chance.”

When Jiang Suizhou heard his words, he felt that the only weight left in his heart had disappeared.

Indeed, there was no need for him to cling to how history unfolded. As long as everything was different now, it was enough.

He grinned.

“I see,” he said. “You married into the royal family, but you didn’t bring a single penny of dowry. You always have to add some.”

Huo Wujiu ground his teeth: “You haven’t had enough yet, have you?”

But Jiang Suizhou remembered the way he raised his voice toward his subordinate and said he was his concubine, and laughed even louder.

“You said it yourself,” he retorted. “Follow your husband, right? Not only do you not have a dowry, but you don’t know how to serve your husband. I am a kind-hearted person. Otherwise, I would have kicked you out of the Prince’s manor.”

He laughed happily, but Huo Wujiu felt his teeth itch.

He was laughing presumptuously, but his smile was so inviting. This fearlessness was obviously due to his poor health. Did he not know he shouldn’t torment him?

Huo Wujiu inched forward and kissed him, as if to vent his anger. After kissing him several times, Jiang Suizhou was still laughing.

It’s yield was the opposite.

Huo Wujiu got angry. He rolled over and pinned Jiang Suizhou to the couch and held him down.

“Serving my husband, is it?” Huo Wujiu gritted his teeth, letting his warm breath fall on Jiang Suizhou’s face.

“You said it yourself.”

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Chapter 184

Although Huo Wujiu could be considered an inexperienced young man, he still knew more or less how men were satisfied.

There were so many ways to do it.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t expect he’d arouse him. He quickly hid, but he was pinned down tightly. Although there was nothing really important for him to do at this hour, it wasn’t the time to do that sort of thing in the daytime.

He might be feeling ashamed, but Huo Wujiu wasn’t.

—— Especially when he was fighting hard for a breath of air, he struggled hard. However, while at it, the fire in his body that ignited from both their bodies rubbing against each other also burned.

So, by the time Huo Wujiu finally let him go, it was already more than an hour later.

A single sniff of the scent of ambergris mixed with some other flavors could make people’s ears burn. But Jiang Suizhou had already lost his ardent vigor. He was leaning in Huo Wujiu’s arms, feeling that his hand was awfully sore.

Even his wrist seemed to have lost its senses.

Jiang Suizhou cursed breathlessly at the bottom of his heart.

Seriously, this didn’t look like something a human was capable of. Fortunately, it was just a little taste now. Otherwise, given how delicate his constitution was, he really would have died.

He was drained, but Huo Wujiu was in high spirits.

He put one arm around Jiang Suizhou and sat there askew with his big horse and golden sword, looking totally insatiable. He was downright unconcerned that he got all those messy things everywhere. It was a mess.

He lowered his head, only squinting and smiling as he kissed Jiang Suizhou.

“Your Highness, how is this concubine’s service?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou closed his eyes and did not bother to entertain him.

Service? What a good concubine he was. Halfway through his service, he let him work hard by himself, pinning his hand to keep him from dodging. In the end, who served whom?

Jiang Suizhou rested his sore and numb hand on his lap, his eyes revealing his dissatisfaction.

However, Huo Wujiu wasn’t waiting for his response either.

He just laughed. His voice sounded low and joyful, and he cuddled Jiang Suizhou in his arms. One moment, he was stretching his hand to grope him recklessly, and the next, his hand moved to his waist again.

“Behave,” Jiang Suizhou finally spoke, and his voice was a little hoarse.

“I’m behaving,” Huo Wujiu lowered his head and gave him a hard kiss on the corner of his eyebrow.

Jiang Suizhou lifted his eyelids and turned his head away, not even bothering to move.

He was truly exhausted. Even if their activity wasn’t such a big movement, it was really enough to exhaust his sick body. On the contrary, Huo Wujiu beside him was brimming with energy. A moment later, he took him to the bed at the back to have a rest, and returned to the imperial study to clean up the remaining memorials for him.

The ambergris incense in the palace room was soothing, so Jiang Suizhou fell asleep in no time. When he opened his eyes again, it was already late.

There were several palace maids and eunuchs standing nearby, with Meng Qianshan in the lead.

Seeing that Jiang Suizhou had woken up, Meng Qianshan promptly approached and helped him sit up.

“You’re awake, Your Highness.” he said. “General Huo instructed these servants before he left to take you back when you wake up.”

“Left?” Jiang Suizhou was not yet fully awake and rubbed his temples. “Where did he go?”

Meng Qianshan said, “Something happened outside the palace, and it’s said to be quite important. But General Huo also said that he won’t come back too late, so Your Highness doesn’t have to wait.”

Jiang Suizhou smiled when he heard this.

“He is good at blowing his own trumpet.” His words were totally impolite, but his tone was soft and gentle.

“Who would wait for him?”

——

The matter on Huo Wujiu’s side was indeed quite important.

After all, Pang Shao and the remnants of his faction were finally raided clean in the past few days. The gold and silver that were confiscated were enough to fill half of the national treasury.

It was such a large fortune that it was staggering. Apart from handing such a vast sum of money to Huo Wujiu, nobody else dared to deal with it.

It was for this reason that Wan Hu went to look for Huo Wujiu today. When Huo Wujiu got the news, he handled the letters on Jiang Suizhou’s desk,

and went out of the palace to Pang Manor to make an inventory.

Gold, silver, pearls and jade, paintings and antiques; they almost filled the huge Pang Manor.

Corrupt officials of the past dynasties had never dared to make things too obvious. Even if their wealth was vast, they would hide it.

But the Pang Manor was different.

Pang Shao was so emboldened by his backing that he piled up so many treasures carelessly in his manor and several warehouses. After all, back then, there was no one more powerful than him in the state, except for the Emperor, not to mention that His Majesty was so close to him that he obeyed everything he suggested. Naturally, he had nothing to fear.

With all these properties, just flipping through the account books made Huo Wujiu read through until it was dark.

So, after he liquidated the money, he used part of it as military expenses, and returned most of it to the national treasury. Now the treasury became his personal property. He was still uncertain about the future, so all this wealth was for him and the soldiers to plan for the future.

Besides these, with a big wave of his hand, he set aside a large portion of the money to reward the upper, middle, and lower army. He had always been generous to his soldiers. In terms of money and food, he would give as much as he could, and was never stingy.

Wei Kai was also quite familiar with his style of action.

After Huo Wujiu calculated everything thoroughly, he helped him distribute the records stroke by stroke.

Wei Kai was very quick in his work. He watched as the money on the account dwindled little by little. Those piles of gold and silver riches gradually had places to go.

In the end, there was still a sum of silver left in the account.

Compared with the silver confiscated from the entire Pang Manor, this sum was but a drop in the bucket. Despite this, it was still a staggering amount of silver. Huo Wujiu touched the silver and pondered for a moment, without speaking again.

Wei Kai asked impatiently, “General, what about this money?”

He had long been used to it. Their General had never put money in his eyes. All the spoils of war were used on the edge of the sword, and their general never left a single cent behind.

Wei Kai asked, but the General gave no response.

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Chapter 185

On the contrary, the General raised his eyes. His expression was cold, and his gaze looked unkind.

Then, the General flipped through the account book and then closed it.

“I’ll use the rest,” Huo Wujiu replied indifferently.

What?

This was the first time ever.

Wei Kai was quite puzzled: “General?”

Huo Wujiu replied with an impatient click of his tongue.

“What’s wrong? Do you still want to grab every opportunity to gain benefits?” Huo Wujiu asked. He looked unconcerned, and instead acted as if justice was on his side.

Wei Kai was a little confused by his retort. While he was still in a daze, the General stood up.

“Go back and send someone to look around the city and outside of the city to check where there are book shops, auction houses, and antique shops. Search them all,” Huo Wujiu ordered.

This made Wei Kai even more miserable.

He quickly said, “G-General, this subordinate can only recognize a few words, so I might go around foolishly… What books do you want? How am I supposed to find them?”

His reasoning stopped Huo Wujiu.

He left these silver, purely because of some unspoken reasons.

He had always regarded money as nothing. After all, he had never lacked money since he was a child. He had no concept of these gold and silver things, much less being interested in them.

But just now, when he saw the various treasures in Pang Shao's mansion flowing past in front of him, he was moved for the first time.

He thought to himself: *How could Pang Shao, an old geezer, dare to collect the priceless treasures around the world, while Jiang Suizhou, who was clearly a relative of the Emperor, paled in comparison to that old man?*

He felt indignant. He felt that these priceless treasures should belong to Jiang Suizhou.

However, he knew that Jiang Suizhou did not like these things.

The money should be spent if need be, but the rare treasures, antiques, calligraphy and paintings would naturally be returned to the national treasury. When the heaps of riches in front of Huo Wujiu gradually dwindled, he actually felt anxious.

The treasury was full; the army was well paid; even the soldiers under his command were going to have a good meal tonight and share their rewards, but his Jiang Suizhou still had nothing!

So, Huo Wujiu grabbed the last sum of money in his hand.

He had to buy something for Jiang Suizhou.

What did he like? An image of Jiang Suizhou reading a book with that focused, quiet and calm look, immediately emerged in Huo Wujiu's mind.

It was precisely because of this that he made such a request to Wei Kai.

But now that Wei Kai asked, he was at a loss.

What books should he buy? Wei Kai couldn’t understand a thing, so could he?

Huo Wujiu stayed silent for a long time. Finally, he uttered a string of words.

“Never mind the content,” he said. “Pick the expensive ones. Pick the most expensive ones in the whole world.”

——

That night, it was just after the second watch by the time Huo Wujiu returned to the palace.

He went straight to Jiang Suizhou’s bedchamber, and when he entered, he saw Jiang Suizhou sitting under the window with his robe on, contemplating over a game of chess. The tea in his hand was steaming, and amidst the tea fragrance was Jiang Suizhou’s calm and serene eyes.

Huo Wujiu caught his breath.

Jiang Suizhou heard footsteps, raised his head at him and said, “You’re back.”

When their eyes met, Huo Wujiu’s mind was filled with the inappropriate image of Jiang Suizhou when he pressed him in his arms today. At that time, his face was flushed, and his eyes were misty.

He cleared his throat, unable to move his legs. A moment later, the man with ulterior motives advanced and sat opposite Jiang Suizhou.

“Hmm,” he said. “I’m done with work.”

Jiang Suizhou noticed that as soon as he entered the threshold, he sat down in front of the chessboard and looked down at the chess game. It was as if he was interested in it.

He raised his hand and asked Meng Qianshan to serve Huo Wujiu some tea, and then said, “Do you like this too? You came just in time. I don’t have a

clue about this game yet. Come and help me.”

Huo Wujiu stared at the chessboard.

Of course he wasn’t interested in the game. Back in the day, in order to force him to learn chess, his father almost beat him to death, but he failed to force him.

Huo Wujiu stared at the chessboard, purely because he could not look at Jiang Suizhou. This man was too seductive. But then again, he had just tasted two bites of meat, so if he were to take another glance, something was bound to happen.

However, it was useless to avoid looking at him.

Huo Wujiu looked at the black and white jade chess pieces intertwined on the chessboard, but what appeared in his mind was Jiang Suizhou’s neck that was as white as jade under the heavy black robe.

Huo Wujiu’s breath deepened.

But opposite him, Jiang Suizhou thought that he was staring at the chessboard in contemplation.

Huo Wujiu’s eyebrows were naturally sharp. At present, he looked entirely serious, and his eyes were focused and earnest. Under the shadow of the lamp, his sternness and solemnity radiated a kind of fatal attraction.

He has always been attractive when he’s serious, Jiang Suizhou muttered inwardly.

After Huo Wujiu pondered for a long time, his hand fell on a black piece. He picked it up and let it fall on the chessboard with a click.

It was obviously such an nonchalant movement, yet it was full of vim. It gave the impression that he was the world to rights.

In a moment, the black and white pieces on the board became like two armies facing each other beyond the walls of their respective territories

under Huo Wujiu’s hand.

Whenever a piece fell, it was akin to a general waving a marshal’s flag in front of a battlefield. Afterwhich, a thousand cavalry immediately galloped forward.

Jiang Suizhou quickly surveyed the chess game.

Black and white were already in a stalemate. Both sides were biting together, as if they were clutching each other’s throats. At this juncture, every step was critical and brilliant. Oftentimes, a single move could take the life of the opponent and seal one’s victory… Huh?

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

He saw that the black pieces on the board, which had been so aggressive and fierce on the board, lay down their arms and surrendered because of Huo Wujiu’s move. Their momentum changed, and they plunged headlong into the circle of white pieces.

Jiang Suizhou was confused.

He raised his eyes at Huo Wujiu, and Huo Wujiu did the same.

Huo Wujiu rubbed a chess piece with one hand. He was deadpan, and his eyes were calm, but his words were confusing.

“It’s time to sleep,” Huo Wujiu said.

Jiang Suizhou froze, then glanced out the window. The night was indeed deep.

“Yes,” he agreed and looked at Huo Wujiu.

However, Huo Wujiu remained seated there, motionless.

Jiang Suizhou was even more confused.

What's wrong with this person?… He urged me to go to bed, and yet why is he still sticking around?

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Chapter 186

Jiang Suizhou looked at Huo Wujiu with some doubts, but Huo Wujiu looked back at him calmly.

Jiang Suizhou seemed to understand what Huo Wujiu wanted to do.

He said, “But you…”

Huo Wujiu stared at him with an air of righteousness: “Do you want to drive me away?”

Jiang Suizhou swallowed the rest of his words.

He pursed his lips, then saw Huo Wujiu raise his hand and look at Meng Qianshan.

Meng Qianshan immediately realized that General Huo didn’t want him to get in the way here.

He quickly restrained his ambiguous smile and led the palace staff waiting around to retreat with him.

In an instant, only two people were left in the room.

Jiang Suizhou observed Huo Wujiu. Huo Wujiu pushed the chess pieces on the chessboard to the side, and rested his elbow on the chessboard. Then, he leaned over towards him.

“Your couch is quite spacious,” Huo Wujiu said, “It’s not like I can’t sleep on it.”

With no other people around, Huo Wujiu acted wantonly. His smile also had a dash of a ruffian’s. He was much like a local tyrant that Jiang Suizhou couldn’t do anything about.

However, Huo Wujiu was actually very apprehensive. He was just a grinning paper tiger.

He wanted to stay here with Jiang Suizhou, and did not hesitate to lower his stance and put on the front of a scoundrel. But even if he appeared domineering, if Jiang Suizhou wanted to drive him out, he couldn’t do anything at all.

Therefore, although he was all smiles, his heart was apprehensively tight.

He knew that Jiang Suizhou was thin-skinned. Huo Wujiu was afraid he’d get annoyed by his forwardness, but having Jiang Suizhou alone to himself was enough. He might as well hug such a person in his arms, since being alone with him was particularly difficult.

Huo Wujiu was an impatient man and couldn’t stand this the most.

He steadily looked at Jiang Suizhou.

Jiang Suizhou stayed silent and also looked at him for a moment.

“Pick up the chess pieces for me.” he said, “There are pieces everywhere, pick them up.”

——

Huo Wujiu finally got what he wanted.

Although he got it by part recklessness and part coercion, it could be regarded as his hard work. It was nothing but fair and aboveboard.

This pleasant feeling was difficult to express in words. He only remembered that he had never been so happy as when he captured Ye City that day and put the flag of the Huo family on the gate tower of Ye City palace.

The hollow buzz of capturing the world was no match for the solidity and satisfaction he felt at this moment.

The night outside the window was dark, and only a few lights remained lit in the hall. After the bed curtains were let down, darkness settled in. This kind of darkness should have been the most unpleasant, but right now, all was quiet and serene.

Huo Wujiu was absolutely comfortable.

Just then, a smack resounded.

Jiang Suizhou slapped Huo Wujiu's arm that wrapped around his waist. He warned, "Stop messing around. I have something to deal with tomorrow, and I'm taking medicine again, so I can't afford you making trouble."

Huo Wujiu's fidgety hand immediately became honest.

"I'm not messing around," he retorted seriously. But before he finished speaking, a chuckle escaped from his lips.

They were both lying in one place, close to each other, and the sound of his laughter was so deep that Jiang Suizhou felt the rumble in his ears. This tingling feeling was quite wonderful, so much so that Jiang Suizhou's heart trembled along with his skin.

It was a challenge to withstand it.

He quickly spoke, "What are you laughing at? Hurry up and go to sleep."

Huo Wujiu hugged him closer.

"It's nothing." He said, "I was just thinking. Why are you being so nice? You could have kicked me out just now."

Jiang Suizhou reminded him, "I can kick you out now, too."

Following Huo Wujiu's deep laughter, he easily clamped Jiang Suizhou's legs, making him unable to move an inch.

“It’s too late,” Huo Wujiu replied in a low voice.

Jiang Suizhou felt that this man was tremendously naive. He glanced at him and closed his eyes.

The candle flames outside the bed curtains burned quietly.

This night was the first for both of them.

For the first time in such a quiet late night, there was a warm source of heat snuggling next to each other, along with calm breathing that was quietly intertwined.

——

Although Huo Wujiu managed to remain in Jiang Suizhou’s room, and both Meng Qianshan and Wei Kai would have praised him for his reward after all the hard work, he alone knew that he still couldn’t eat someone despite him being under his eyes.

Jiang Suizhou’s injuries were not fully healed, plus he was busy every day. He always had poor energy, so naturally, he couldn’t stand Huo Wujiu’s pursuit.

Still, Huo Wujiu was overjoyed, so much that his tail could have risen to the heavens.

He used to hate men who turned into wimps after becoming a family man, but now he found that as long as he could see his man every day and hold him in his arms at night, he felt content even with just hugging him and rubbing his back.

He wanted nothing more.

—— On the contrary, Jiang Suizhou was feeling miserable.

Huo Wujiu, this man, was too active!

If it was the original him, perhaps he could still resist him. But his ill and weak physique had not been cured, and his injuries had not yet healed. He was sleepy every night, but Huo Wujiu was beside him, he even wanted to make trouble with him.

Squeezing and caressing his hands and feet weren’t enough, his evil *thing* that couldn’t be mentioned was still extremely disobedient. It raised its head high for no reason, and forced Jiang Suizhou to solve it for him.

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Chapter 187

At first, it was fine to use his hands, but Huo Wujiu didn’t stop there twice after. He developed some other methods to torment him.

Jiang Suizhou concluded that he had led a wolf into his room.

Nonetheless, he couldn’t resist Huo Wujiu’s eyes. That pair of eyes was so deep and fiery. When he insisted on Jiang Suizhou to help him, he would shoot him with a pitiful look like that of a defeated dog, simply rendering him helpless.

Jiang Suizhou thought to himself, he had fallen so badly.

They quietly waited for the arrival of the forces from the north in this manner. The days passed day by day, and soon June was almost over.

It was the hottest time of the year in Lin’an, and Jiang Suizhou’s vigor turned weak and weary. Although he had almost recovered from his injuries, he was still weak and couldn’t use ice, so Li Changning had to add a few medicinal herbs to his daily medicine to clear away heat and lower his temperature.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t stand this.

Ice couldn’t be used in Jiang Suizhou’s room, so he suffered from the heat every night when he came back. He was already blazing hot, so these moments were more unbearable. Every night, he would toss and turn for a long time before drifting off to sleep.

But he didn’t leave.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t bear to see him suffering from the heat. Moreover, Huo Wujiu was very busy in the past days. He went out early and returned late, but Jiang Suizhou didn’t know what he was up to. He couldn’t sleep well at night, which affected his energy even more.

Jiang Suizhou began to persuade him.

But Huo Wujiu refused to listen, and he would deliberately act shamelessly toward Jiang Suizhou. No matter what kind of marquis or nobility he was, he was also a wily old bird that had rolled out of the barracks. No one could resist him when he was playing the rogue.

Jiang Suizhou had no choice but to give up, secretly suppressing all his worries.

Until this day.

It was getting late, and it was almost the third watch. The summer heat during the day had subsided a lot, and for someone like Jiang Suizhou who had a cold disposition, it was already an extremely suitable temperature. However, once Huo Wujiu was with him, the heat would definitely spin and rise once more.

Jiang Suizhou was flipping through a book on the bed. He was already starting to doze off, but Huo Wujiu still hadn’t returned.

He yawned and flipped another page.

Footsteps sounded.

He looked up, but saw an unfamiliar soldier. The soldier knelt down on one knee in front of him and greeted him.

“Your Highness, the General asked this subordinate to bring word to you. He has something to deal with, so please don’t wait for him,” the soldier reported.

Jiang Suizhou froze and responded, “Got it. Thank you for making this trip.”

The soldier bowed and said he was flattered, then retreated.

Jiang Suizhou sat in the same place, until Meng Qianshan came to serve him to sleep, then put away the book in his hand awkwardly.

——In recent days, Huo Wujiu forcibly took the book from his hand whenever he returned. It had only been a while but it had become a habit.

Jiang Suizhou couldn't help smiling at the thought of it. He put away the book and laid down to rest with Meng Qianshan's help.

It was always cool at night. Without Huo Wujiu's tossing and turning, a fireplace so to speak, he didn't have to deal with his pestering, so he thought he could sleep more soundly tonight.

Against all odds, the night was like water, and the candle flames flickered, but Jiang Suizhou couldn't sleep.

He laid down with his side empty. It was a little too quiet, so for a time, he felt entirely unaccustomed to it. Consequently, his sleepiness disappeared.

This was the first time Jiang Suizhou suffered from insomnia in all these years.

He didn't know if Huo Wujiu's presence was too strong or if he was too domineering, but after so many days, he had left his traces in all the places around him.

Like a canine that has taken over a territory.

That reference made Jiang Suizhou smile to himself.

As the night wore on, the sound of the water clock leaked hollowly from outside, one trickle at a time.

Having had a weak disposition, Jiang Suizhou gradually dozed off.

But he was a light sleeper this time, and the slightest movement woke him up. After an unknown amount of time, there was a rustling sound beside

him, as if someone was carefully lifting the curtain and squeezing onto his bed.

Jiang Suizhou opened his eyes and saw Huo Wujiu, who was cautiously about to lie down.

The moment Huo Wujiu noticed his movement, he quickly turned his head vigilantly, and saw Jiang Suizhou looking at him sleepily.

His half-asleep, half-awake demeanor was the most charming.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t resist leaning down and kissing Jiang Suizhou on the corner of his eye. It wasn’t enough, so he changed directions and captured his lips.

That wasn’t the end of it.

When Jiang Suizhou pushed him away, his bed clothes were already a little loose, and Huo Wujiu was embracing him.

Jiang Suizhou tilted his head to look at the sky outside. It was already predawn.

“It’s about to dawn, right?” Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu hasn’t kissed him enough yet. Like a wolf smelling blood, he sniffed Jiang Suizhou’s neck again.

Jiang Suizhou pushed him twice, but he didn’t budge an inch.

“Then why didn’t you take a rest first and then rush back?” Jiang Suizhou said.

Then he heard Huo Wujiu speaking from the neck. His voice was muffled, “No, I can’t sleep outside.”

The corners of Jiang Suizhou’s mouth moved, as if rising up unconsciously.

“Then go to sleep,” he said. “What has kept you busy until the middle of the night?”

Huo Wujiu obediently turned over on the bed, wrapped Jiang Suizhou into his arms and hugged him tightly.

“Secret,” he replied.

Jiang Suizhou smiled at his response, but he closed his eyes without further questioning.

What secrets did Huo Wujiu have? Although the two of them hadn’t been together for a long time, he still fully trusted him.

——Although he didn’t know where this confidence came from.

He closed his eyes and was about to fall asleep, but unexpectedly, Huo Wujiu was still being dishonest beside him.

He lay quietly for a while, and then suddenly turned over and sat up as if he was out of breath.

Jiang Suizhou snappily opened his eyes: “What’s wrong?”

Huo Wujiu was wearing his boots with his back to him. With gritted teeth, he spoke.

“Don’t you want to know what it is?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou was a little confused: “Didn’t you say it’s a secret?”

Huo Wujiu put on his boots indiscriminately, stood up, turned his head and retorted angrily.

“Won’t you ask even if it’s a secret?” he asked.

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Chapter 188

Jiang Suizhou almost sobered up from his drowsiness. He propped up and sat, then watched as Huo Wujiu lifted the bed curtains. He strode out, seemingly to search for something.

Soon, he returned and handed a booklet to Jiang Suizhou.

“Here, it’s for you,” he said.

He looked quite calm, but in fact, he was very nervous.

His men had searched all over Southern Jing and finally found this book in an auction house in Yangzhou. He heard that a prestigious family in Yangzhou originally collected this, but the family fell into decline. A prodigal son squandered the family fortune and engaged in every kind of evil imaginable, so the book was sold out.

He was told that scholars liked this very much.

Huo Wujiu’s subordinates didn’t understand a bit about it, and he was the same. However, since it was a good book, he should give it to Jiang Suizhou.

Huo Wujiu traveled thousands of miles to Yangzhou today and spent a lot of money at the auction house, and finally bought this scrap of a book.

There were countless talented scholars in Jiangnan, and some were rich gentry. Many people were eyeing this book. A few days before the auction, Yangzhou even set up a betting game, betting on whose hand this famous book would fall to.

As a result, it was bought by the little-known Second Master Huo.

At that time, the spectacle at the auction house was a tad difficult to control. There was even a great scholar who competed in bidding with Huo Wujiu. He failed to raise the price, however, and failed to succeed bidding. He even flicked his sleeve and left in anger.

However, Second Master Huo naturally didn’t care about him.

He just carried the book and speedily rushed back to the palace to sleep with his husband.

At any rate, in his opinion, this book was really not a good thing.

The cover was old and tattered, and the handwriting inside was also messy and flamboyant. Coupled with the obscure language, he couldn’t understand a word in it.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t understand why those literati were fond of picking up such junk.

Therefore, he felt uneasy at this time, fearing that the book he bought would not please Jiang Suizhou.

He stealthily looked at Jiang Suizhou.

Meanwhile, Jiang Suizhou reached out and took the book, flipped through it, but then his face remained expressionless.

Jiang Suizhou froze in place.

This book turned out to be the manuscript of a great musician of the previous dynasty!

That person was famous for his talent in that dynasty, and no divine music had ever been produced after his generation. A single poem of his could be passed down from mouth to mouth in the ancient times when information was not available, but in modern times, it was familiar and well-known even to women and children.

This collection of poems were actually written with his own hands.

His ideas and revisions, as well as some inspirations, were all in the book. Flipping a page was akin to talking to the famous writer from a distance, which was entirely different from trying to figure out his thoughts based on the words a thousand years later.

Jiang Suizhou was rendered momentarily speechless.

It should be known that after a thousand years, only copy scraps of this book were placed in the National Museum, and it was a national treasure-level cultural relic. He had gone to read it, and there were only a few words left on the scrap page. It was not a thick one like what he was holding.

This feeling was too surreal.

Jiang Suizhou did not return to his senses for a moment. He was about to speak, but Huo Wujiu suddenly stretched out his hand and snatched the book away.

“It’s not a surprise. I’m teasing you.” He said, “It’s just a trashy book. Let me throw it away for you.”

Huo Wujiu was feeling chagrined.

Sure enough, it was a piece of junk that only poor literati would pursue. Jiang Suizhou just flipped it open and took a look, and his face went cold.

Better get this shit out of here, he thought.

But as soon as he snatched the book away, Jiang Suizhou immediately panicked and rushed forward to grab it, almost falling off the bed. Huo Wujiu hurriedly stepped forward, caught him and held him steady in his arms.

“What are you doing?” Huo Wujiu was shocked. He almost fell!

Jiang Suizhou didn’t answer. Instead he anxiously rebuked, “What are you doing?!” Then he moved to get the book.

“Why are you throwing it?!”

Huo Wujiu was stunned for a moment, and only then did he realize that Jiang Suizhou actually treasured this rubbish.

He looked down and took a look at the scrap book he was holding with one hand.

Since Jiang Suizhou appreciated it, it must not be trash. In an instant, the scrap book looked a lot more pleasing to Huo Wujiu's eyes.

The next moment, Jiang Suizhou snatched the book back, treating it as if it were precious.

What was this in Jiang Suizhou's eyes? It was the blood and ingeniousness of a divine talent, a treasure of civilization. With this book, people thousands of years later could also be like him, forming a divine friendship with this famous master.

No amount of money could buy that.

"Where did you get it?" Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu concealed the pride and joy in his heart.

"I bought it," he said.

"Did you go out today just to buy this back?" Jiang Suizhou asked.

Huo Wujiu felt even more happy when he heard his question.

You like this piece of shit, right? You know I treat you well, right? When you're mine, I will give you whatever you like under the heavens, be it a star that can't be picked from the sky or a treasure that can't be bought by the world.

Anyway, no matter what it is, I'll give them all to you.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyebrows, and his lips twitched.

“It was a little far, and it took a little effort on the road.” His tone was flat, but the tail behind him was wagging high.

But Jiang Suizhou couldn’t care less about praising the big dog who had done good deeds at this moment.

He held the book in his hand, as if he would damage it if he were to exert a bit more effort. Next, he carefully flipped through it, pages by page.

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Chapter 189

Huo Wujiu was initially pleased, but when Jiang Suizhou flipped a couple of pages without stopping, he was unsettled.

How come he didn’t ask how far was a bit far? Why didn’t he ask him how much effort he put into it?

The book was indeed a piece of junk. Was it worth Jiang Suizhou’s full attention, to the point of ignoring him, the giver?

Huo Wujiu glared at the book with an unkind gaze.

The next moment, he snatched the book away again.

Jiang Suizhou thought he would throw it again, so he rushed to grab it. This time, Huo Wujiu succeeded. He effortlessly hid the book aside, stretched out his hand and pressed Jiang Suizhou into his arms.

“It’s not even dawn yet. What are you reading? You’ve got nothing to do tomorrow, right?” he asked.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t even hesitate. Both his eyes were only focused on the book Huo Wujiu hid behind him, so he replied, “It’s no big deal.”

General Huo captured the reluctance in his eyes, and the sea of jealousy in his heart stirred a huge wave.

“It’s no big deal?” His eyes sank.

Jiang Suizhou, however, stared at the book and reminded him, “Be gentle. Don’t damage it.”

The paper could not withstand the wear and tear of the years. If it was damaged and scattered in their hands, would he become a sinner in history?

This was for future generations!

He was only concerned about the national treasure thousands of years later, unknowingly igniting the fire in Huo Wujiu's eyes the moment he heard his response.

Fine, this lousy booklet was more important than him, right?

The next moment, Huo Wujiu raised his hand, and the booklet flew in a parabola and landed on the desk next to them with a snap.

"Be gentle!" Jiang Suizhou's heart tightened up upon seeing this.

"Got it, I'll be gentle."

Huo Wujiu said with fierce gritted teeth.

The next moment, he pulled the bed curtains, rolled over and pinned Jiang Suizhou to the bed.

——

The distance from Ye City was more than 6,000 miles away. Officials' caravans had always been slow, getting to their destination in a month or two.

Now that summer has started, the roads would be better. After around three days, a messenger arrived to report that the troops from Northern Liang were about to cross the river.

Huo Wujiu had to send someone to meet them.

Jiang Suizhou had a discussion with Huo Wujiu. His army was stationed everywhere, and the only available one was Lou Yue. After mulling over it, he sent Lou Yue and asked him to send someone to meet them at the riverside.

Once that group of officials were stationed at various places in Southern Jing according to Huo Wujiu's arrangement, the entire Southern Jing would become his sphere of influence.

Naturally, they had to carry things out carefully.

Therefore, with Huo Wujiu's order, Lou Yue was specially summoned into the palace by Jiang Suizhou, and was specially instructed.

"This is a major matter. All the officials were sent from the Northern Liang, so General Lou must pay close attention to them," Jiang Suizhou said.

Lou Yue also knew Huo Wujiu's current situation. He was originally Southern Jing's military commander, yet he took refuge with Huo Wujiu. Naturally, his life was tied to Huo Wujiu. The two of them were extra cautious, so Lou Yue naturally did not dare to act rashly. He nodded and said, "Your Highness, rest assured. I will be careful."

Jiang Suizhou nodded: "Of course, I am at ease with General Lou."

Lou Yue pondered for a moment and said, "I just have a presumptuous request."

Jiang Suizhou said, "Just say it, General Lou."

Lou Yue said, "Although I have always disliked Wanjun running around, but these days in Lin'an, she has indeed been detained to a great extent. Two days ago, she knew I was going out, so she's been clamoring to follow me. I really have no choice either…"

Hearing this, Jiang Suizhou couldn't help but smile.

Although Lou Yue was indeed a chauvinist, he was particularly soft-hearted towards Lou Wanjun. If not, he would not have cultivated Lou Wanjun's temperament.

"Miss Lou has always had a sense of propriety. If General doesn't want to detain her in Lin'an, just take her with you," Jiang Suizhou said.

Lou Yue sighed: “Then thank you, Your Highness.”

After saying that, he got up to say goodbye.

Jiang Suizhou smiled: “General Lou doesn’t have to worry too much. Although Miss Lou’s nature is a bit different from ordinary girls, it does no harm. If a girl insists on living a sheltered life, it’s all because of those rotten and pedantic scholars. Since General Lou doesn’t like them, naturally you don’t need to listen to them.”

Lou Yue nodded in agreement. His words naturally didn’t fall on deaf ears.

The caravan from Northern Liang was about to cross the river, so Jiang Suizhou didn’t dare to delay him any longer. After resting for two days, the people who were to greet the officials from Northern Liang set off.

Lin’an was very close to the Great River, and it only took three to five days to march there. Another scout reported the situation back and forth. In the past few days, Jiang Suizhou had been paying attention to the news sent back by Lou Yue.

It was as if he was facing a formidable opponent, and Huo Wujiu found this a rarity.

“What are you afraid of?” He said, “They’re just some civil officials. They won’t fall into the river and drown. As long as they reach the south, what else can happen?”

Jiang Suizhou shook his head: “It’s better to be careful. So long as they haven’t landed in Jiangnan, anything could happen.”

Huo Wujiu couldn’t argue with him, so he could only go to Li Changning and ask him to add a few more calming herbs to Jiang Suizhou’s daily medicine.

Five days later.

An urgent letter was sent to Jiang Suizhou’s desk with a fast rider. When the scout entered the palace, he was already panting, and when he brought the

missive up, his legs trembled weakly, and he knelt down with a plop.

“The general said this letter is urgent. Please read it quickly, Your Highness!” the scout said.

Jiang Suizhou frowned at his words and hastily fetched the letter.

When he unfolded the envelope, he recognized Lou Yue’s handwriting inside.

“The officials are all here, but the Crown Prince of Northern Liang has also tagged along.”

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Chapter 190

Jiang Suizhou immediately clenched his hand that was holding the letter.

No wonder … he calculated the duration of the trip from Ye City. Seeing that the time was delayed a lot, he suspected that something was amiss.

He guessed that Huo Yuyan would not let things go even with Emperor Zhao Yuan's agreement, but to his surprise… he was actually afraid of Huo Wujiu to this extent.

According to history, Huo Yuyan's body was fundamentally damaged since the Xunyang War, much worse than before.

He had been the Crown Prince since. He was raised in Ye City, he didn't dare to step a foot out of it. Even so, he only lived to be over 30 years old before perishing. For his current constitution, he was able to leave Ye City and go to Lin'an under such circumstances, showing how much he feared Huo Wujiu.

Jiang Suizhou took the letter and pondered for a while.

"Go back to General Lou and say we know," he said. "Tell him to just relax."

The scout hurriedly got up and obeyed.

Jiang Suizhou spoke again, "Meng Qianshan, go and ask where General Huo has gone. Send someone to ask him to come back as soon as possible."

"Understood! This servant will do so right away!" Meng Qianshan promptly responded.

After the two retreated, the imperial study room instantly became much more quiet.

Jiang Suizhou took the letter and pondered over it.

Since Huo Yuyan dared to come, it meant that he did not know that Huo Wujiu had evidence in his hands. Although Huo Wujiu killed Li Sheng, everyone in the world now thought that Li Sheng was disloyal and wanted to get rid of Huo Wujiu.

Because of this, it was no surprise that Northern Liang sent so many officials to the south in his correspondence with Emperor Zhao Yuan.

Presently, only Jiang Suizhou, Huo Wujiu and Lou Yue knew the truth, and only Jiang Suizhou and Huo Wujiu knew of the secret letters between Huo Yuyan and Pang Shao.

Although Huo Yuyan's arrival was beyond Jiang Suizhou's expectation, the enemy was already in the light while they were in the dark. On the contrary, Huo Yuyan was more passive.

If handled properly, for them, Huo Yuyan would take the initiative to send himself to their door.

Jiang Suizhou rubbed the edge of the paper and fell into deep thought.

——

In the summer, raging waves rose in the huge river that spanned between the Northern Liang and the Southern Jing. Trees created pleasant shade on both banks of the river, forming a Jiangnan scenery.

Lou Yue stood at the riverside and took a deep breath.

As soon as the news of Huo Yuyan's arrival reached him, he immediately sent someone to forward it to Jiang Suizhou without any delay.

He knew that Jiang Suizhou was in Lin'an and would certainly have everything ready. All he had to do was to hide all his thoughts and safely

welcome all the people sent from Ye City.

He looked cold, but Lou Wanjun, who was next to him, did not take notice.

She waited impatiently, riding a horse and strolling along the river. She rolled her whip and tucked it back around her waist. Afterward, she raised her hand and folded a willow, then gently swung it while urging her horse to saunter along the riverside.

She shook Lou Yue's heart.

"Behave!" Lou Yue ordered her, frowning in disapproval.

Lou Wanjun was totally unaffected. She swung the willow branch with one hand, and controlled the direction with her other that was holding onto the reins.

"Does standing stupidly means being behaved?" she retorted, "I have nothing to do, and restraining this horse is terrible."

Lou Yue held his tongue for a period and admonished her, "His Highness the Crown Prince of Northern Liang is coming later, so be careful and don't violate the etiquette."

Lou Wanjun snorted with laughter and said, "What Crown Prince, hah?! Decades ago, it was me who protected him and brought him to play back then."

Lou Yue hastened to rebuke her, "That's nothing serious! No matter what happened in the past, he is now the Crown Prince and a member of the royal family. You shouldn't utter such words indiscriminately!"

Lou Yue considered the disagreements between Huo Yuyan and Huo Wujiu over and over again, but still did not tell Lou Wanjun. On the one hand, Lou Wanjun was straightforward and could not hide her thoughts, and on the other hand, it was safer for one less person to know about the matter.

What was more, in his opinion, Lou Wanjun was just a girl too. She neither had an official position, nor was she a man, so she might as well not know

about it.

Lou Wanjun was absolutely oblivious to his countless thoughts and worries.

She chattered, “Of course I won’t say a word of it in front of him. I am not stupid.”

While the two of them were chatting, the shadow of the ships gradually became visible on the river. The banner hanging on the gaff was exactly that of Northern Liang’s. The leading ship was two-stories high, which was likely the ship the leader boarded.

Lou Yue tensed up from head to toe, and he hastily restrained the expression on his face.

“They’re here.” He said, “Watch your mouth.”

Lou Wanjun gave him a somewhat strange look.

Her father might appear austere and solemn, but his expression at the moment didn’t give the impression that he was welcoming a family, but rather like he was preparing to deal with some enemy.

She withdrew her gaze and looked towards the river.

As the ships approached inch by inch, they swayed with waves and slowly sailed across the flowing river. The river was wide, and the ships sailed steadily. It should have taken a quarter of an hour before they docked at the bank.

The soldiers under Lou Yue’s command had already lined up on the river bank, with silver armor and red tassels, and flags fluttering. Seeing the ships dock, Lou Yue led the officers under him to welcome them. The largest ship lowered its gangway and the guards quickly paraded off the ship.

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Chapter 191

Lou Yue stopped in front of the gangway.

After making sure that the guards lined up on both sides, several eunuchs and palace maids disembarked with honor guards. Lou Yue prepared a smile, but Lou Wanjun, who was beside him, clicked her tongue, unimpressed.

“What a big show!” she whispered.

Lou Yue gingerly gave her a cross look.

At that moment, a person slowly walked up to the gangway.

His snow-white brocade boots were densely woven with gold threads of python patterns, glittering in the sunlight and reflecting the unique shade of gold.

The man who looked like a snow-white gold robe, wearing a gold crown with jade inlay and a face like a crown.

The graceful young man dressed in a snow-white golden robe looked down. He was wearing a jade-inlaid gold crown, and possessed a complexion as clear as jade.

As he stepped off the pedal, Lou Yue and everyone behind him knelt down one after another, causing their armors to clang.

“Lou Yue, the last general, welcomes Your Royal Highness!” Lou Yue greeted him.

Behind him, mountainous shouts followed.

The crowd fell to their knees, and their silver armor glittered for a time. They looked like a landslide and a tsunami. The young man remained calm and relaxed. He slowly walked down, stopped in front of Lou Yue, and bowed to hold his arm.

“Uncle Lou need not be polite,” he said warmly.

Lou Yue stood up along with the force he exerted. He raised his head and recognized the gentle and elegant person smiling at him in front of him as none other than Huo Yuyan.

He was no different from when he was young. He was gentle and fonde of smiling. He looked handsome and elegant, especially his eyebrows, warm and firm. When he was in Yangguan, he was different from the wild rascals raised there. He was usually accompanied by poetry and books, and his speech was also unhurried.

But Lou Yue also knew that this child was born sinister.

Huo Wujiu only liked to practice martial arts and disliked reading. On this account, his father beat him up all day long. When he was around seven or eight years old, when he was the most skinny, he called him ‘Lou Yue’ without respect for his elders.

Huo Yuyan was different. Not only was he proficient in poetry and books, he was also disciplined and knowledgeable. He never slackened in martial arts. He had no talent for it, so he devoted himself to diligence. When Huo Wujiu took a bunch of little attendants to the mountain to hide in the shade, he practiced the horse stance alone in the yard without shade until the third watch.

It was precisely because of this that when he started to lead the army during the uprising, he became a well-known jade-faced Confucian general in the army. If Huo Wujiu was not in the limelight, who wouldn’t have known about Huo Yuyan’s fame around the world?

With this in mind, Lou Yue sighed inwardly and showed a happy smile on his face.

“Rituals cannot be invalidated!” He laughed. “It’s been a long journey. It must have been hard on you, Your Highness.”

Huo Yuyan gently smiled and shook his head.

“I’ve been out of shape in recent years, but I’m fine.” He said, “The officials who traveled south took care of me, so the trip was slower. Nevertheless, I wasn’t weary.”

Refined and cultured, with honor worthy of a scholar, he looked like he hasn’t changed at all.

Had Lou Yue been ignorant to what he did behind the scenes, he wouldn’t have believed that this child, who was sinister at heart, but was extremely hardworking and knew his manners back then, would stab Huo Wujiu in the back.

“Then this general is relieved!” Lou Yue said.

“Uncle Lou, you’re treating yourself as an outsider. In front of you, I’m is not His Highness, but just your junior.” Huo Yuyan said warmly, “Uncle Lou, you haven’t aged at all. Seeing you now, it is as if you were still in Yangguan.”

Lou Yue smiled and waved his hand: “It’s not at all like what Your Highness said. More than ten years have passed. I’m old!”

“Before I left, Father specifically instructed me.” Huo Yuyan continued. “This time, it’s all thanks to your help that Wujiu successfully recovered Jiangnan, Uncle Lou. Father said that I must personally thank you for your righteousness.”

After saying that, he bowed and cupped his hand, and moved to bow to Lou Yue.

Lou Yue hurriedly stopped him.

“This is unacceptable! Your Highness, there is a difference between ruler and subject!” he deterred him.

After supporting Huo Yuyan, Lou Yue felt how weak his body was. Originally, although this boy looked handsome, his martial arts skills were as good as any excellent general in the army. But the moment he helped him up, he obviously felt none of his strength. He was light and airy, as if his bones were empty.

Despite knowing that the child was vicious, Lou Yue couldn't help but feel sour in his heart.

When the Marquis of Dingbei was alive, although he only had Huo Wujiu as his son, he favored Huo Yuyan the most.

Lou Yue easily stopped Huo Yuyan's bow. Huo Yuyan didn't argue with him. Instead, he went along with his force and stood up straight.

"Your Highness has had an exhausting journey. It's inconvenient to stand here and talk the whole time." Lou Yue said, "A banquet has been prepared in the city. Why don't Your Highness go with this general and a meal? Recuperate for two days before we leave for Lin'an."

Huo Yuyan smiled lightly when he heard his offer. His expression was gentle, and he betrayed not a clue: "That would be the best. Thanks to Wujiu. If he hadn't arranged the whole Southern Jing in an orderly manner, I wouldn't have been lucky enough to hide here for leisure."

With his joyous and gentle demeanor, who could see the shady things behind his back?

Lou Yue lowered his eyes and hid his complicated gaze.

Just then, he heard Huo Yuyan chuckle. He turned sideways and asked, "Is Sister Wanjun also here?"

Lou Wanjun raised her eyes and saw the slender and quiet young man of yesteryear with a jade-like stature, standing in front of her. His eyes were as gentle as water.

“Sister Wanjun has grown up to be so beautiful.” He said, “You look like Mrs. Lou in between the eyes and eyebrows.”

He complimented her with a faint smile.

Lou Wanjun drew a breath without a trace. She unexpectedly got tongue-tied, and didn’t know how to reply.

I’m so pretty. She muttered to herself.

Her heart seemingly teetered, like a magnolia flower blowing in the wind.

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Chapter 192

The people Meng Qianshan sent soon found Huo Wujiu. He was in the army at this time. Upon hearing that Jiang Suizhou was rushing to see him, he immediately put down the matter in hand and rushed back to the palace.

Jiang Suizhou handed the secret letter to Huo Wujiu to read.

There were only a few words in the letter. Huo Wujiu only took a glance and frowned.

He put the letter on the table, and his eyebrows sharpened.

“Is he courting death?” His voice rang cold.

Jiang Suizhou said: “Not necessarily. Since he dared to come, he must have thought he’s outstandingly disguised himself in front of you. Or perhaps he suspects that you are suspicious of him and is eager to test you.”

Huo Wujiu sneered.

“Does he think I’ll still give him the chance?” he said.

Jiang Suizhou asked, “What do you plan to do?”

Huo Wujiu replied nonchalantly, “Didn’t send himself to the door? The entire Southern Jing is my territory now. He only has to come, and I will take him down. Once the letters that you saved alone are made public, this alone is enough for me to kill him.”

Although Huo Wujiu indeed spoke the truth, Jiang Suizhou shook his head and said, “That’s impossible.”

“What?” Huo Wujiu did not understand.

Jiang Suizhou said, “If you were the Crown Prince now, or if he was just your subordinate, then you could indeed just kill him. However, he is now both your brother and the Crown Prince of Northern Liang. If you execute him based on a few letters, even if these letters are genuine, the world will say that you are brutal. After all, these letters did not really kill you, and it’s all in the past. Settling accounts at this juncture isn’t advisable.”

Huo Wujiu was not at all impressed.

“Let them speak,” he said, “Do you think I’m afraid of whatever comes out of their stinky mouths?”

Jiang Suizhou knew he wasn’t afraid of such things, but he was reluctant.

He had come from a thousand years later and knew what kind of reputation Huo Wujiu had. If such a General with a long-standing reputation ruined his reputation for the sake of a villain and became a traitorous official who was condemned by the emperor and reviled for centuries, it would be the biggest dishonor.

There should be a clear line between right and wrong.

Even if he didn’t have to take care of things after a hundred years, he didn’t want to see Huo Wujiu being stabbed in the spine by the world in the next few decades.

“You don’t know the power of those Confucian scholars and courtiers,” he persuaded him.

Huo Wujiu couldn’t care less how powerful those literati who couldn’t even wield a sword were.

But when he looked up at Jiang Suizhou, he swallowed the words that reached his lips.

He knew that he was undaunted, but Jiang Suizhou was.

He didn’t want Jiang Suizhou to be afraid.

“Then what can we do?” he asked, changing the subject.

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment when he heard his question.

“Although I have some ideas, I haven’t made up my mind yet.” He said, “The best way, of course, is to let him lay his hands on you again. If people all over the world know that he’s after your head because of fear, and has such a criminal record, it will inevitably make him infamous. People’s pity will also be on you. By then, whatever you do to deal with him, it will be taken for granted.”

After speaking, he hesitated: “But…”

However, how to make Huo Yuyan assassinate Huo Wujiu again without letting him know about Huo Wujiu’s current situation was a bit difficult.

Jiang Suizhou mused and shook his head.

He was now without a lead, and when was contemplating, his eyebrows unconsciously screwed up. Huo Wujiu couldn’t bear to see him worrying, so he moved forward and pulled him into his arms. He hugged him with one hand and rubbed his brow with the other, massaging the tightened crease away for him.

“What are you worried about? Isn’t it easy to handle?” He said, “I know Huo Yuyan. Although he appears warm, he values his face the most. When we were kids, if anyone humiliated him and embarrassed him, he did nothing on the surface, but he definitely tripped the culprit up behind his back.”

Hearing this, Jiang Suizhou brightened up.

“Then there’s a way.” He said, “As long as you provoke him to make a move against you, then there will be a reason to take him down.”

Huo Wujiu hummed in response.

“So stop worrying,” he said. “If there really isn’t a way, I just need to send some people to act and pretend to be his people, won’t I?”

His retort stunned Jiang Suizhou.

Immediately afterwards, he heard Huo Wujiu say indifferently.

“But it doesn’t have to be like this.” He said, “It’s not been a day or two that he attempted to kill me, so why not give him another chance to do it?”

Although he sounded light-hearted, Jiang Suizhou discerned something in his tone.

He knew that Huo Wujiu wasn’t unforgiving, but complacent.

It wasn’t that Huo Wujiu was unable to think of a way to crush Huo Wujiu in one fell swoop. Unlike Huo Yuyan, he never bothered to use this way of imposing guilt to drive the other party to death unjustly.

He has always been this open and honest.

Jiang Suizhou raised his eyes to Huo Wujiu, he couldn’t resist smiling.

That smile lit his eyes up, and made Huo Wujiu’s heart race. His arm around Jiang Suizhou suddenly tightened.

The next moment, he raised his hand and covered Jiang Suizhou’s eyes, hiding those eyes.

“Hmm?” Jiang Suizhou was confused.

Huo Wujiu replied.

“Li Changning said you still have to recuperate for ten days to half a month to get well.” He said, “He asked me to be careful these days, and not to torment you.”

“So what?” Jiang Suizhou was puzzled and raised his hand to pull Huo Wujiu’s hand down, but Huo Wujiu stopped him.

When Huo Wujiu spoke again, his voice was already hoarse.

“So, in broad daylight, don’t provoke me,” he said.

Jiang Suizhou: “…”

Did I provoke him, or is his control too poor?

He just stared and smiled at him. How did it turn into seduction in his eyes?

This man was really proficient at turning things upside down.

——

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Chapter 193

Lou Yue had prepared a banquet for the reception. He was enthusiastic; Huo Yuyan also knew how to be polite; and the civil and military officials were lively. After the meal, it could be said that the host made the guests feel at home.

After the banquet, everyone was five to six percent drunk. Huo Yuyan also drank more and let people help him go down to rest.

Lou Yue also drank too much wine. He was considering Huo Yuyan's poor constitution, so when he heard that he wanted to rest, he simply asked people to end the banquet.

Huo Yuyan gladly accepted Lou Yue's kindness.

He smiled and said goodbye to Lou Yue. Afterwhich, he turned around to get on the carriage back to his residence.

Everyone only saw that he was tipsy. Unbeknownst to them, the moment he got into the carriage, he slumped on the seat, and his breathing turned weak and chaotic.

The eunuch accompanying him knew what was happening. When he saw him get into the carriage, he followed him into the carriage.

As soon as he got into the carriage, he swiftly took out the pills from the hidden compartment of the carriage and fed them to Huo Yuyan.

The medicine smelled so bitter that it made people want to vomit, but Huo Yuyan didn't bat an eyelid. He stuffed the pill into his mouth, slouched in the carriage, and closed his eyes.

The effect of the medicine took effect in a short while. He was back to normal, but his face was still white, and his breathing was also feeble.

The eunuch was extremely worried.

He knew their Crown Prince's health very well. Since His Highness suffered a core injury at the Xunyang war, he might still look the same as normal people on the surface, but the core of his body was extremely deficient. Hence, many years down the road, he couldn't go out, and could no longer practice martial arts, riding, and archery. He only spent his days in and out taking medicine. Even when drinking, he also had to drink a special medicinal liquor that an imperial physician concocted with a mixture of ginseng and tiger bones.

This time, His Highness not only traveled far away, but also pretended that he was fine. He drank so much wine outside today, so how could his body stand such a torment?!

The young eunuch thought it wasn't worth it.

It was just General Huo… Although he was arrogant, they didn't seem to be rotten to the core. Why was His Highness so afraid of him?

"Your Highness, even if you want to win Lou Yue over, you don't have to be so desperate ah!" The eunuch could not help but advise him.

Huo Yuyan, however, waved his hand and said in a light voice: "It's okay. Let's head back for now."

The eunuch knew that although His Highness the Crown Prince looked gentle and soft, he was in fact the most stubborn. As long as he decided on something, no matter who persuaded him, it would be useless.

He sighed and stepped out of the carriage.

Huo Yuyan was left alone. He quietly leaned against the carriage's window, and looked dimly outside, following the brocade curtain that was blown by the wind.

Of course he knew that drinking too much was damaging to his body, but he knew better. 300,000 of the 500,000 soldiers stationed in Southern Jing today were all Lou Yue's former soldiers.

Although he called Lou Yue, Uncle, on the surface, he knew all too well that he treated Huo Wujiu differently. Lou Yue's old friend was Huo Wujiu's father, not his father. Moreover, Lou Yue has favored Huo Wujiu more since they were young.

The elders seemed to be more partial to those children who lacked manners and had no respect for their elders. Huo Yuyan was already used to it.

Therefore, facing Lou Yue, he had to be more attentive and show a little more sincerity.

After all, he currently couldn't figure out whether Huo Wujiu suspected him because of Li Sheng or not. Despite this, regardless of this, he has to make some foolproof strategy to be prepared in case of unforeseen danger.

On the one hand, he had to think of ways to separate Huo Wujiu and those civil officials who came south, and on the other hand, he must control the strength of Southern Jing, so as to prevent Huo Wujiu from controlling the overall situation.

So, he must make use of Lou Yue.

Of course, he also knew that with a meal of wine and a couple of exchanges, Lou Yue would not be willing to stand in his camp. Lou Yue wasn't quick to switch sides and of two minds. The reason Huo Wujiu was able to use him this time was all because of his dead uncle.

However, Huo Yuyan was not worried.

He quietly watched the pedestrians walking to and fro outside the window. Under the night, there was prosperity and tranquility.

He knew that everyone has weaknesses.

And Lou Yue's biggest weakness has been exposed unabashedly.

Lou Wanjun.

As long as Lou Wanjun and him were tied to the same boat, then even if Lou Yue hated him to the bone, he would definitely make use of him, and he would never be disloyal.

And to bind a woman to him and share a common fate, as long as he was willing to put his heart and soul into it, it couldn’t be easier.

Huo Yuyan quietly looked out the window for a while, then lowered his eyes.

This was a foolproof plan for him, but deep inside he hated it.

He hated it terribly.

If his worsening condition hadn’t been draggin him behind, he wouldn’t have to resort to such a desperate measure, deceiving a woman to achieve his goal.

But, he had no other way out.

If it wasn’t for the Battle of Xunyang, if his father hadn’t insisted on leading the troops to save Huo Wujiu and his eldest uncle, he wouldn’t have suffered such injuries.

He couldn’t forget Huo Wu Jiu’s hypocritical appearance when he found him years ago.

He and his father lingered on with their last breath, and their bodies were ruined on the battlefield, but Huo Wujiu remained healthy and full of vim and vigor. Afterward, he became the well-known God of War because of that war. The whole world also knew that Huo Wujiu picked Huo Yuyan up from the battlefield.

Why was that?

Huo Yuyan lowered her eyes and closed her eyes calmly.

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Chapter 194

Even when the officials arrived in Southern Jing, the greeting party was still moving at a snail's pace because they had to take care of Huo Yuyan along the way.

It was not until the tenth day of the first lunar month that the palace received a report from the scouts, saying that the team that greeted the Crown Prince and the officials of Northern Liang were about to arrive in Southern Jing.

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment after receiving the news, and said, "I see. Go and invite Qi-daren to the palace."

The scout responded and withdrew.

"Do you want Qi Min to go out of the palace to meet him?" Huo Wujiu asked.

Jiang Suizhou nodded: "He is the most suitable."

Huo Wujiu pondered for a while, then sighed: "If he sees Qi Min, he will definitely think more. Qi Min can be regarded as an old minister of Southern Jing. So I used two veteran ministers of Southern Jing instead of so many generals to welcome him —— But Qi Min's official position is quite high. He's bound to be thrown into confusion if he sees Qi Min."

Jiang Suizhou said, "That's exactly the idea."

Huo Wujiu raised an eyebrow: "Then let someone prepare a dinner banquet later. I will personally give him a reception. At that time, I'll show my achievements off to make him uneasy and reveal a hint of disloyalty. By then, I'm afraid he won't be able to resist taking action."

Jiang Suizhou pondered for a moment and said, “That’s a good idea.”

Huo Wujiu stood up, went around behind him, reached out and wrapped his arm around him: “Just stay in the palace and wait for my news.”

Jiang Suizhou smiled and raised his head to look at him: “Won’t you let me go?”

Huo Wujiu frowned upon hearing this, and said without thinking, “Of course you can’t go. What if he targets you?”

Jiang Suizhou shook his head: “But if I don’t go, he will be suspicious of you.”

Huo Wujiu’s voice sank.

“Let him be suspicious whatsoever.” He said, “As far as I’m concerned, moving against him anytime is just up to my pleasure. How can I let you go and put yourself in danger? Don’t be ridiculous.”

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help but argue: “What danger can there be now in Southern Jing?”

But Huo Wujiu didn’t listen to him. “You can’t take any risks. Just stay in the palace. Even if he wants to know what kind of person you are, he doesn’t have that much ability to do so.”

Jiang Suizhou looked up at him and couldn’t help but sigh deep inside.

Huo Wujiu had to complicate simple things in order to protect him, that was a fact that couldn’t be changed.

He restrained his smile, put on a serious look, and looked Huo Wujiu in the eye.

“What did I tell you before?” He said, “I don’t need you to protect me and keep me behind like this. It’s counterproductive.”

Huo Wujiu's stance, however, did not soften the least bit: "That won't work. This time is different."

Jiang Suizhou asked, "What's different?"

Huo Wujiu said, "Huo Yuyan is very sinister. Who knows what he will do?"

"But ever since he stepped into Southern Jing, he and his men have all fallen under your surveillance, haven't they?" Jiang Suizhou said, "What's more, you and I both know how Lin'an is guarded today, so it's difficult for him to do anything."

Huo Wujiu was at a disadvantage and did not speak.

Jiang Suizhou understood. Since he refused to speak, it meant he was in the wrong but was still making a fuss.

He reached out and clasped his hand.

"If I'm not mistaken, he followed these ministers here and will definitely try every means to sow discord between you." He added, "Ranging from those ministers' official positions to their daily food and daily life, there are places where he can use tamper with. You only know that these people are loyal to you, but you should also know that the human heart is the most fickle thing. You have always stayed in Yangguan and have been to Ye City only several times. Can you be sure that you can grasp the thoughts of every courtier?"

Although Huo Wujiu showed a cold face, a cold heart and an invulnerable appearance at this time, he couldn't help flipping his hand and grasping Jiang Suizhou's hand into his palm when Jiang Suizhou laid his hand behind his.

"… Not really," he admitted.

The profound thoughts between courtiers and the ruler was indeed such a headache for him to delve into.

“That’s why you need me.” Jiang Suizhou said, “I know them better than you do.”

Huo Wujiu pursed his lips and did not speak.

Jiang Suizhou asked warmly, “Let me go with you tonight, okay?”

Huo Wujiu struggled for a moment and finally returned, “… Then in what capacity will you attend? And who in the city today doesn’t know my relationship with you? Huo Yuyan will definitely make things difficult for you.”

Jiang Suizhou laughed deeply. He tugged Huo Wujiu’s hand upward and pressed it against the side of his face.

Huo Wujiu lowered his gaze and saw Jiang Suizhou sitting on the throne looking up at him. A fox-like smile spread on his overly delicate face, making the soft red mole at the corner of his eye stand out even more vividly.

“What’s so hard about that?” Jiang Suizhou said, “As long as he considers me a little pretty boy that has confused you, distracted General Huo’s attention and made you obey me in everything, then he had to put up with everything for your sake.”

Huo Wujiu looked down at him. He knew all too well that he was deliberately pretending, but his Adam’s apple still couldn’t help rolling up and down.

… Sure enough, he’s indeed a demon that can hook people’s souls.

He gulped. A moment later, he clenched his teeth, leaned down, pressed Jiang Suizhou on the throne, and kissed him ferociously.

“You take my life along with you, leave it at that.”

Huo Wujiu gritted his teeth and said between kisses.

——

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Chapter 195

As the current Chief Minister of Southern Jing, Qi Min went out of the palace to meet Huo Yuyan, which really expressed how much importance Huo Wujiu attached to it.

Everyone knew that Qi-daren was going out of the city to meet Huo Yuyan today. What kind of person was Qi-daren? Counting the years to the present, he was now a veteran minister that has served four dynasties. Even if Pang Shao were alive, he would give him some respect. However, to be able to go out of the palace to meet Huo Yuyan at the age of 70 was evidence that General Hou treasured his brotherhood with His Highness Huo Yuyan.

But in Huo Yuyan's point of view, this wasn't the case.

When he heard the news that Qi-daren was waiting outside the city, his face became a bit ugly. He responded drily, lowered the curtain, and then said nothing after that.

Qi Min? No matter how famous he was, he wasn't a rarity in Huo Wujiu's eyes.

Huo Wujiu disliked civil servants, especially Qi Min, a bitter scholar full of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness, who betrayed his former ruler. If Huo Wujiu really valued him and had no enmity with him, why didn't one of his high-ranking officers come to meet him?

In Huo Wujiu's eyes, any soldier was more important than Qi Min.

For a time, Huo Yuyan couldn't even guess what Huo Wujiu was thinking.

Did he let Qi Min out of the city because of Li Sheng, or was he already suspicious, so he used Qi Min to go through the motions? It could also be that Huo Wujiu had no other intention, and it was only because Qi Min's reputation was out there. Was it to let the world see how much he valued him and to show his loyalty to the Northern Liang court, so as to earn himself a reputation and dignity?

Qi Min was so special that Huo Yuyan was at a loss for a while.

He calmly pondered for a long time. His body was hopeless, and it was even more inadvisable for him to overthink. The carriage rocked all the way, and when they arrived outside the city gate of Lin'an, Huo Yuyan was already exhausted physically and mentally. He felt drained from head to toe.

He coughed a few times at the sight of the looming lofty city gates. He forced himself to endure the discomfort that wracked his body, propped up as usual, and sat straight in the carriage.

The carriage came to a halt and a resounding voice outside.

"This minister has been ordered to welcome Your Highness the Crown Prince!"

Then, a soldier opened the curtain of the carriage for Huo Yuyan.

A eunuch came forward and helped Huo Yuyan out of the carriage. Just as he put his arm on Huo Yuyan's, he felt his frailty and could not help but look at him worriedly.

However, he appeared normal as ever with even a gentle smile on his face.

The eunuch gingerly withdrew his gaze.

Huo Yuyan stood in front of the carriage, threw away the eunuch's hand, walked to Qi Min, and helped the trembling old minister up.

"It's been hard work for Qi-daren to wait here," Huo Yuyan gently said.

However, Qi Min maintained an indifferent expression. He showed no enthusiasm, and only a businesslike attitude. He took a half step back and bowed: “This minister respectfully welcomes Your Highness. The General has prepared a banquet in the palace, and he’s waiting to treat Your Highness to dinner after your wearing journey.”

Huo Yuyan looked as usual, but his gaze paused on Qi Min’s face.

Looking at his attitude… Was it because he was an old minister of Southern Jing, or because of Huo Wujiu’s instruction?

Huo Yuyan felt even more uncertain about Huo Wujiu’s intentions.

He shook, but the young eunuch dared to step forward and promptly supported him. He smiled faintly. When he looked back, he motioned the captain of the guard behind him with his eyes. Then he turned around and said with a warm smile, “I’m indeed tired. Thank you for your effort then, Qi-daren. Please lead the way.”

Qi Min echoed, and with the same indifferent front, he turned around and walked away.

Next to him, Lou Yue took everything in his eyes.

He knew that Qi Min was definitely Jiang Suizhou’s arrangement. Presently, Huo Yuyan personally rushed to Southern Jing because he couldn’t figure out Huo Wujiu’s stance and wanted to come and see for himself. Jiang Suizhou guessed it, so he asked the people around him to create a deceptive trick to make Huo Yuyan uncertain, and thus increasingly become uneasy.

Only when people were caught in a confusion and uncertainty would they make the most irrational choice.

With this in mind, Lou Yue greeted him and said smilingly, “Your Highness doesn’t need to take it to heart. That old geezer, Qi Min, has a stinky temper that no one likes to deal with. Your Highness must not bother with him.”

Huo Yuyan wanted to guess Huo Wujiu's thoughts through these people under his command, but he was a meticulous and careful person, a deep and astute man. When people like him speculate about others, some details would likely confuse them.

Then, they'd better go out of their way and mess with Huo Yuyan's head.

Sure enough, when Huo Yuyan heard this, he smiled and replied warmly, "What's wrong with that? Qi-daren is highly respected. It is only right for him to have some temper. I appreciate his true temperament."

Lou Yue laughed loudly at his words: "Since Your Highness is generous, this General is relieved! Your Highness, please get into the carriage."

Huo Yuyan smiled in response, turned around and boarded the carriage.

The smile on his face today was already forced, but when he arrived at the palace, he could no longer sustain it.

In the resplendent and magnificent banquet hall, the civil and military officials were already seated and waiting for him.

The main seat was empty, so it must have been reserved for him.

However, the person sitting next to him, the second top most seat, was not Huo Wujiu.

Instead, it was a man dressed in the grand crown of the Prince Qin of Southern Jing. He was quite young and born overly beautiful, so delicate to the point of being almost bewitching.

Under the light, he smiled faintly at him. His smile was self-contained and profound, like a victor, flaunting his strength in court against him.

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Chapter 196

Huo Yuyan’s gaze stopped on the man, and his eyebrows twitched without a trace.

The person who could appear here and sit in that position in a dignified manner… Could he be the rumored Jingwang?

His gaze slipped to the opposite side again, and sure enough, on the seat opposite him was Huo Wujiu who was sitting upright.

Huo Yuyan’s gaze paused.

The left side was respected in the current dynasty. Since Huo Wujiu gave the left side of the seat to Jingwang, could there be any deep meaning in it?

However, before he could ponder deeply over it, the civil and military officials in the hall stood up one after another, bowed to Huo Yuyan and said, “Welcome Your Highness.”

Huo Yuyan’s eyes wandered around.

All the ministers in the hall bowed to him and saluted him, but Jingwang, who was sitting beneath his seat, seemed to have not seen him. When he met his gaze, he merely smiled and nodded his head, right as a greeting.

His provocation couldn’t be anymore obvious.

Huo Yuyan withdrew his gaze and acted as if he didn’t see it. With a gentle smile, he swept a glance over the civil and military officials in the hall, and said warmly, “You don’t have to be polite. Please get up quickly.”

As the courtiers rose and took their seats, Huo Yuyan also lifted his legs and walked straight to the main position and sat down.

“This elder brother came here without telling you. Second Brother, you’ve worked hard to put things in order for me.” After sitting down, Huo Yuyan smiled and looked sideways at Huo Wujiu. “I haven’t seen you for half a year, Second Brother, but you’ve become much more calm and sophisticated. I am relieved to see that the whole Southern Jing is in order.”

Huo Wujiu raised himself slightly, but remained as cold and detached as usual. He replied in a low voice, “Thank you, Imperial Brother.”

Huo Yuyan didn’t show a trace of displeasure. Instead, he picked up the cup of wine on the table and smiled towards the officials in the hall beneath him: “Of course, the unification of the world today is also to everyone’s credit. Now that I, Yuyan, is here, I must give a toast to all of you for Imperial Father.”

Once he raised his cup, the civil and military officials in the hall naturally followed suit and stood up with their cups of wine.

Huo Yuyan glanced sideways.

That Jingwang, still sitting there, picked up his glass lazily and looked up at him.

Huo Yuyan calmly retracted his gaze.

“Although the great cause has been accomplished now, we still need everybody’s full support to settle the state later on! I am not talented, so I would like to thank you all in advance!”

After saying that, he raised his glass, tilted his head and downed his wine.

The ministers below responded in unison. They, too, emptied their cups in one go.

Huo Yuyan put down his glass and said with the same smile, “Today is just a family feast to welcome and help us travelers wash off the dust. You don’t

have to be polite. Please help yourself."

This signaled the start of the feast.

For a while, gaiety filled the banquet hall, followed by a series of toasts.

Huo Yuyan, on the other hand, turned his head sideways and regarded Huo Wujiu with a smile.

"The one on the left is His Highness Jingwang of Southern Jing, right?" he asked.

Huo Wujiu, who picked up his chopsticks, looked up at him and said lightly, "It's him."

Huo Yuyan smilingly said, "No wonder he looks familiar. But he's considered family."

Huo Wujiu made no response. He just clipped a dish and ate it.

He has always been so arrogant, and Huo Yuyan was used to it.

As if he didn't see it, he then asked, "I just don't know…" He appeared hesitant when he turned his head and looked at Jiang Suizhou.

He saw Jiang Suizhou sitting leisurely in his place, commanding the eunuch behind him to serve a grilled fish that was a little far away into his plate.

"Does Jingwang have any inconveniences in his legs and feet?" Huo Yuyan asked.

When he voiced this question, Huo Wujiu and Jiang Suizhou both raised their heads and looked at him.

Huo Yuyan then showed an innocent and gentle smile, as if he didn't even realize what was wrong with his statement. He said, "Forget it. It's just that I haven't seen Your Highness get up just now. If you are not feeling well, I have two eunuchs around me who are proficient at medicine and can give Your Highness a look."

When he said this, his eyes calmly fell on Jiang Suizhou.

To his surprise, Jiang Suizhou sneered and leaned lazily on the back of his chair.

He raised his eyes and looked at Huo Yuyan.

Even Huo Yuyan had to admit that this man was entirely captivating, with both an upright and evil aura that could most likely bewitch people's minds. He just looked up at him with his eyes raised and a smile at the corner of his mouth. He looked indolent and charming, resembling a refined demonic creature.

"If you don't get up and pay your respects, does it mean your legs are broken?" Jingwang retorted. "I just didn't want to."

"This…" Huo Yuyan gave Huo Wujiu a tangled look.

At this juncture, Huo Wujiu wasn't looking at him, and his eyes were on Jingwang's face instead. His Second Brother has always been taciturn. Even if a captive foreign beauty couldn't attract a second glance from him, but at this time, he was staring at Jiang Suizhou with eyes brimming with a smile. What was more, the corners of his lips were hooked.

It took him half a beat slower to register the awkwardness in the atmosphere at this time. Afterward, he raised his eyes and glanced at Huo Yuyan.

"Don't take offense, Elder Brother." Huo Wujiu explained, "He's always been like this. He's spoiled and doesn't like to bow to people."

When he said this, the smile on his face had not yet faded away.

On the other side of the seat, Jingwang laughed meaningfully and drawled, "Who are you calling spoiled?"

Huo Wujiu's eyes locked on him once more.

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Chapter 197

“I didn’t name you. Better stop talking and have something to eat.” His voice actually softened a bit with a sprinkle of coaxing.

This was the first time Huo Yuyan had seen Huo Wujiu acting like this.

Facing a man, he softly spoke and smilingly. He obviously was hooked.

However, a crisp ‘da’ sounded on the opposite side.

Huo Yuyan followed the noise and realized that the seated Jingwang threw his chopsticks onto the plate.

“What is there to eat?” He raised his eyebrows, raised his chin, and looked at the table with dullness and disgust. “What happened to the royal chef today? This squirrel fish is too salty.”

Huo Wujiu hastily raised his hand and summoned several eunuchs.

“Why don’t you go and change the squirrel fish on Jingwang’s table?” His expression cooled down, and his eyebrows all regained their usual sharpness. “Go and ask the imperial chef how he’s doing his job. Better go, cook a new one and send it here this instant.”

The eunuchs nodded repeatedly and swiftly went forward to remove the squirrel fish from Jiang Suizhou’s table.

Huo Yuyan raised an eyebrow.

When Huo Wujiu turned his head, he curled his lips towards Jingwang. Jingwang merely gave him a glance, took his chopsticks and started to eat another dish. The pale eunuch beside him also diligently stepped forward

and repeatedly flattered him in an attempt to calm him down. He asked him to try other dishes to see if they were to his liking.

Huo Yuyan restrained his emotions and glanced at Huo Wujiu.

Huo Wujiu, however, smiled at him calmly, and with helplessness painted on his face, he said, “Elder Brother, I’ve made you laugh. He’s really spoiled.”

Huo Yuyan froze and barely forced a smile.

“There’s no harm done,” he said.

——

In this way, Huo Yuyan justified his suspicions.

Why did Huo Wujiu inexplicably show so much malice towards him? Yet, he was sometimes good and sometimes bad, keep him guessing why. On top of that, why did Huo Wujiu assign Southern Jing’s courtiers to important positions, but left his soldiers behind.

It must be because of this Jingwang.

He did not expect that Huo Wujiu would one day become a hero who became a prisoner of love… not to mention the so-called ‘beauty’ was a man.

Huo Yuyan’s eyes deepened in an instant.

He feigned nonchalance, but was keeping tabs on the interaction between Huo Wujiu and Jingwang the whole time.

This was the Huo Wujiu he had never seen before.

Indulgent, and even a little gentle. He glanced at Jingwang more than once, and his smile oozed with a bit of ambiguity. That Jingwang also feared nothing with somebody at his back. He was picky at the banquet, and spoke

with veiled sarcasm to Huo Wujiu. However, Huo Wujiu indulged him. The look in his eyes was that of a bewitched man.

Under such circumstances, everything would be easy to handle or not.

Huo Wujiu's attitude made Huo Yuyan feel relieved. He not only believed that he did not yet discover a thing about all his doings, but also that he could make proper use of him.

But Jingwang posed a problem.

Huo Wujiu was deeply captivated by him, making him grant all his requests, which was indeed a handle. But whether this handle was his weakness, or a vermin buried in his side, depended on whether Jingwang was a brainless good-for-nothing.

Huo Yuyan fell into contemplation.

The banquet was nearing its end, Jiang Suizhou also showed a hint of drunkenness from his seat on the left. He slouched in his chair, yawned, then raised his hand.

The eunuch beside him hurried forward and held his hand.

"This Prince is tired, so I'm heading back to rest first." He ordered lazily, "I won't disturb you two brothers from catching up."

Huo Yuyan nodded with a light smile and said, "Jingwang's health is important. Since you're tired, you can head back first."

Jiang Suizhou gave him a sweeping glance, and an unfathomable smile seeped out of the corners of his lips. A twinkle sparkled in his eyes as he gave Huo Wujiu a glance.

Huo Wujiu let out a deep laugh and said, "Don't forget to leave the door open for me when you go back."

At this time, the banquet hall was a hub hub of voices. His voice wasn't that loud, and the officials beneath didn't catch a word of it. However, they

audibly fell into Jiang Suizhou and Huo Yuyan's ears.

Jiang Suizhou answered with a couple of laughter, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. He clasped Meng Qianshan's hand on his side, turned around and left.

Huo Yuyan watched his back disappear into the back of the hall, then turned his attention back to Huo Wujiu.

"What's going on between you two?" He frowned, showing some disapproval on his face. He gave off the impression of a good brother worried about his younger brother.

Huo Wujiu put down his wine cup, looked up at him, smiled lightly, and said offhandedly, "Nothing's going on. It's just as Imperial Brother saw."

"Do you really want to keep him by your side?" Huo Yuyan asked with a frown.

Huo Wujiu leaned back on his chair and said with an unrestrained and frank posture, "Elder Brother, don't look at him as a man. He's interesting."

His smile radiated two points of contentment.

Huo Yuyan gritted his teeth, his expression bearing pain and anguish: "But he is clearly…"

"It doesn't matter what it is. He doesn't take himself seriously. If not, do you think he would have waited for the state to be destroyed and still stay by my side so willingly? He's terrified of death and just wants to rely on me for survival, so why don't I let him have his wish?" Huo Wujiu said carelessly. "Just treat him as a plaything."

His demeanor indeed looked as if he has a canary by his side to play with and relieve his boredom.

In that moment, Huo Yuyan couldn't determine if he really meant it.

He thought for a moment and said, “If you want to keep him for fun, it’s inconvenient for me to say anything more. But Wujiu, you are now looking at turning twenty-four. You have long reached the age of forming a family, but it has been delayed only because of the war some years ago. Now that you have me in the court, you don’t have to worry about anything. You still have to decide on a marriage partner and start a family as soon as possible.”

Hearing this, Huo Wujiu was indifferent.

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Chapter 198

“I’m not in a hurry,” he said. “What’s the panic? Let me play for another two years.”

Huo Yuyan persuaded him kindly, “Won’t it be delayed…”

“How is it delayed?” Huo Wujiu raised his eyes, and the smile at the corner of his mouth transmitted a wicked luster. “You have no idea how much trouble that little thing can cause. I’m afraid my backyard will not be peaceful after I marry a respectable woman. I’m not in a hurry. Wait for some time until I get tired of playing. By then, it won’t be too late to discuss this. In any case, there’s no use for me to carry on the family line. Elder Brother, you’d better marry a princess consort first. That’s the foundation of the state.”

Hearing this, Huo Yuyan lowered his gaze, his eyes flashing inexplicably. He replied with a smile, “It’s not like you don’t know my body’s condition… But it’s all right. Whether you or Shu’er, for me, your children are all the same as my own.”

The Shu’er he was referring to was his biological sister Huo Shu. She was also Huo Wujiu’s cousin, who just entered Ye City some years ago and got married early. Now, she has several children.

Huo Wujiu raised his eyes and surveyed Huo Yuyan. He appeared calm and quiet, and the words he uttered really sounded heartfelt.

Huo Wujiu smiled in response, but the words he said were totally insincere.

“It’s good if Elder Brother can think of it this way,” he said.

———

Lou Wanjun drank a little too much.

In fact, she was sitting around some officers. After working with them these days, they didn't treat her as an outsider. They gathered together, and once drunk, they eagerly addressed each other as brothers. They downed one cup after another without any control.

Lou Wanjun was enjoying himself, but Lou Yue was so angry that he blew his beard and glared at her.

"You're someone's daughter, and fine for you to mingle with men. But how could you drink to this extent?" He approached and scolded her.

Lou Wanjun, however, did not take him seriously. Her father trained her since she was a child, and her foundation had long been solid. Seeing that Lou Yue was angry, she got up carelessly, raised her hand towards the generals who were drinking together with her and said, "I'm fine. I didn't drink much. Let me go out and sober up."

After saying that, she turned around and strode out.

Lou Yue knew that this was her usual trick. Knowing that he was going to admonish her, she found an excuse to hide. Lou Yue, however, could do nothing about it. He raised a finger and pointed at the generals, warned them a few times, and then went back to his seat.

Lou Wanjun was quite skilled in hiding.

The night in the palace was cool, plus there was a large lotus pond outside the banquet hall. At this moment, the night breeze was blowing, and the flowers and leaves that filled the pond were swaying. The moist fragrance of the lotus flowers also blew on her face.

It felt pleasant.

Lou Wanjun let the wind blow comfortably, slipped and went to the lake. Palace lanterns were hung by the lake at night. They were so delicate, captivating the viewers to look closely at them.

Lou Wanjun then decided to take a stroll here.

But just as she reached the lake, she heard someone call out to her from behind.

“Is it you, Younger Sister Wanjun?”

The voice was particularly familiar. Lou Wanjun quickly turned around and saw a man sitting in a pavilion by the lake. He was dressed in a snow-white robe with glittering gold threads.

She was a little surprised: “Why is Your Highness also here?”

The man coughed a few times, as if his strength couldn’t support him.

Lou Wanjun was afraid that something would happen to him, so she hurriedly went forward and saw Huo Yuyan sitting alone in the pavilion. There was no one around to wait on him, but he was coughing terribly.

Lou Wanjun strode forward, took off the outer robe she was wearing, and draped it over Huo Yuyan’s shoulders.

“Why are you here alone, without even an attendant?” Lou Wanjun asked.

Huo Yuyan raised his hand, blocking her from draping her coat.

“Put it on quickly. You’re a girl. Don’t catch a cold,” Huo Yuyan said tenderly.

Seeing that he wasn’t coughing anymore, Lou Wanjun didn’t resist him, so she snorted and put her coat back on.

“Your Highness, shall I take you back?” she asked.

Huo Yuyan shook his head: “There’s no hurry. I just came here to hide for a quiet moment and sober up.”

He silently looked at Lou Wanjun.

He wouldn’t admit that, apart from paying attention to Huo Wujiu at the banquet, he has been paying attention to Lou Wanjun’s movements. When he saw her drinking to her heart’s content, and Lou Yue frequently looking at her with displeasure all over his face, he knew that something like this would happen in a while.

He took advantage of his poor health, and came here to wait for the rabbit.

Lou Yue had been keeping a close eye on Lou Wanjun so he didn’t find a chance to be alone with her. Hence, he could only do this.

Lou Wanjun was a bit anxious: “This is not the way to sober up, right? The wind is cool at the lake, Your Highness. I think it is better for you to…”

Huo Yuyan interrupted her.

“I remember you called me Brother Huo before,” Huo Yuyan said genially.

Lou Wanjun scratched her head with some embarrassment.

But wasn’t that so? Although she and Huo Wujiu always called each other by name in private and cursed each other, she didn’t dare to commit such a blunder in front of Huo Yuyan. If she dared to show any disrespect to him, her father was the first to censure her, swinging a broom to beat her up.

She smiled and replied, “… It was also a childhood thing.”

Huo Yuyan sighed lightly.

“Right, it’s all when we were young.” He said, “Nowadays, everything has changed.”

Lou Wanjun showed some confusion and asked, “What else has changed?”

Huo Yuyan looked at her, seemingly a little hesitant to say anything.

The bright moonlight shone on his face, illuminating his delicate appearance even more cleanly, even revealing a shimmering glow. He smiled rather helplessly and shook his head, presenting a fragile beauty.

“It’s nothing. I’m just sighing over a sentiment,” he replied.

Lou Wanjun was a little puzzled.

This Elder Brother Huo… has also changed a lot. When he was a child, he was considered very efficient, but now that he had grown into a beauty, he was rather dawdling.

“Great,” she said perfunctorily with no better response she could think of.

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Chapter 199

Huo Yuyan was looking at the moon beyond the eaves at the moment, and did not notice Lou Wanjun's expression.

He smiled faintly.

"It's just that sometimes, I still miss the days in Yangguan." He turned his head sideways and looked at her.

Lou Wanjun nodded and agreed, "In Yangguan, there's naturally more freedom than now."

Huo Yuyan smilingly said, "I feel the same way. Little Sister Wanjun, although I'm now considered to be under one person and above all others, I do not want to be such a cold Crown Prince. You see, Wujiu is not very close to me now."

Having said this, he smiled and shook his head: "However, it may not be all because the two of us are estranged. Now that he has grown up, whoever he wants to keep around him is naturally not up to me. It's just a pity that he has let a villain drive a wedge between us, but I I can't say anything."

Lou Wanjun raised her eyebrows without a trace.

The people around Huo Wujiu?

Huo Yuyan has just arrived. He must be implying something. Could he be referring to His Highness Jingwang?

Does Jingwang also sow discord between the two brothers? No way. Jingwang and she have some kind of friendship. She knew that His Highness was a kind person, so how could he do such a thing?

She had doubts in her heart, but she didn’t dare to say anything.

Because for some reason, she had this feeling that Huo Yuyan’s words were specially directed to her. If she had never been in touch with Jiang Suizhou before, she would have believed Huo Yuyan’s words. But now… they somehow sounded strange.

Suspicions sprouted deep in her heart, but she didn’t dare to voice out whatever came to mind.

She stayed silent for a second and then said tentatively, “Indeed. Who would have thought that Huo Yuyan and Jiang Suizhou would make true of what started as rumors? It’s okay. I think Huo Wujiu just finds him a novelty.”

Huo Yuyan was swayed when he heard her response.

Although he couldn’t completely believe Lou Wanjun’s words, he also knew that she was a frank and honest person, who spoke her mind. Since she could say so, he felt even more reassured.

That being the case, Lou Wanjun wasn’t standing in Huo Wujiu and his company’s camp, so she could be used.

With that belief, he gently smiled and shook his head, “Forget it. As long as Wujiu is happy, that’s all that matters. However, Little Sister Wanjun, you don’t have to be so formal in the future. Just keep calling me Brother behind others, all right?”

Lou Wanjun blinked her eyes and looked at him.

Indeed, this person’s mind has always been inscrutable. He appeared soft and weak, but his words seemed to mean something else. It felt inexplicably wrong.

But…

Lou Wanjun thought to herself: Who cares? It’s no big deal to call him Brother. For the sake of his good looks and frailty, just let him be.

She paused and replied in a whisper, “Got it, Brother Huo.”

Huo Yuyan curled the corner of his mouth following the name she called out, and reached out to caress her hair.

Lou Wanjun vaguely figured out his intention. Seeing that he was sick and weak, she simply stepped forward and squatted down: “Brother Huo, what are you trying to do?”

Huo Yuyan’s hand fell on her hair.

“It’s nothing. I just didn’t expect that after not seeing you for so many years, you’ve grown into such a big girl.” He smiled warmly.

His smile was actually ambiguous, akin to a merman in the sea singing his song in an attempt to attract passing ships to him.

——

When Huo Wu Jiu returned that day, he reeked of alcohol.

However, he could hold his liquor well, plus no one dared dissuade him from drinking. Just having a few drinks with Huo Yuyan wasn’t enough to moisten his throat.

As soon as he left his seat, he headed straight to Jiang Suizhou’s bedchamber.

However, it wasn’t clear whether the room was Jiang Suizhou’s or his. He has stayed in for a long time, so be it daily clothes and supplies, or the few people who always served him, all of them were now here. The vitality of two people seemed intertwined in the room.

As soon as he entered the door, he saw Jiang Suizhou sitting there, frowning.

“What’s the matter?” He thought Jiang Suizhou encountered something difficult, so he hurriedly asked as he approached him.

Jiang Suizhou raised his head and said somewhat anxiously, “I didn’t expect that Huo Yuyan would still think of such an idea.”

“What kind of idea?” Huo Wujiu asked quickly.

Jiang Suizhou pursed his lips.

“Just now I specifically left someone to keep an eye on him, and that person came to report that he waited for Miss Lou at the lake. He didn’t know what the two of them talked about, but Huo Yuyan even caressed Miss Lou’s hair.”

Huo Wujiu sneered: “He wants to start from Lou Wanjun. Don’t tell me he wants Lou Yue to defect? Not to mention that Lou Wanjun is not so easy to fool, even if she is, Lou Yue doesn’t have the guts to betray me because of such a thing.”

But Jiang Suizhou shook his head.

If it was just the matter in front of him, he would naturally not worry. But… he recalled some traces about Lou Wanjun in history.

She brought a posthumous son to guard the border with Huo Wujiu. Historians speculated that the child was Huo Wujiu’s. After all, the child was born with Huo Wujiu’s surname.

But nobody was certain. Since she and Huo Wujiu loved each other, and had a son, why didn’t they get married in their lifetime?

Now, Jiang Suizhou has figured out the reason behind.

If in history, Huo Yuyan also made a move on Lou Wanjun and succeeded, then the child and the relationship between Lou Wanjun and Huo Wujiu all could be explained.

If this was true, he naturally could not let Lou Wanjun repeat the same mistake.

“But what if Huo Yuyan succeeds?” Jiang Suizhou was a little anxious. “Although he is weak, his mind is deep, while Miss Lou is simple-minded. If we really let him trick Miss Lou, how can we explain it to General Lou?”

Huo Wujiu froze, somewhat unable to understand his credulous attitude.

He thought for a moment and asked, “Do you think that Huo Yuyan will definitely be able to fool Lou Wanjun?”

Jiang Suizhou nodded and said, “Although there is no evidence now, I believe in this conjecture.”

When he said this, he felt a bit apprehensive deep inside.

All his conjectures were based on those historical materials from his previous life. Without relaying these words to Huo Wujiu, his attitude now was rather baffling.

He thought Huo Wujiu wouldn’t believe him either…

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Chapter 200

But just then, Huo Wujiu let out a long breath.

“You’re right.” He stepped forward, sat beside Jiang Suizhou naturally, and raised his arms to embrace him. “Since Huo Yuyan started it, he should have a chance of winning. In this case, we must not let him succeed.”

Jiang Suizhou was stunned.

“I just said it was guesswork. How could you believe it?” he asked in a whisper.

Huo Wujiu replied with a series of chuckles.

“What about it?” he retorted. “There’s no harm in preparing beforehand. I can’t put it aside just for you to guess blindly and then toss and turn all night long, can I?”

Jiang Suizhou retorted, “I wouldn’t do that.”

Huo Wujiu responded: “Yeah, yeah, you won’t. Anyway, since I already know about it, you don’t have to worry. There are many people under my command who can be used. They can keep an eye on him just so you’ll be at ease.”

Jiang Suizhou nodded.

Huo Wujiu continued, “Today at the table, he also tested me a bit. After a bit of thinking, I went along with what he said.”

Jiang Suizhou asked, “What did he say?”

Huo Wujiu said, “It’s nothing. He said that I had worked hard in the past days and could take a good rest this time. He said he could help me with the subsequent arrangements for those ministers.”

“It’s true that he’s testing you.” Jiang Suizhou frowned. “If you disagreed, it was tantamount to rebelling. If you agreed, then you are allowing him to divert your power.”

Huo Wujiu laughed: “That’s why I agreed.”

Jiang Suizhou lifted his head from his arms and looked at him.

Huo Wujiu also sat down at him and said in a low voice, “But just because I agree, doesn’t mean you do, right? I’ll be busy with the army tomorrow, so just go to the imperial study to disturb him. My subordinates are scattered all over the palace, so he can’t stir any trouble. Don’t hesitate to take action and leave him no chance to meddle.”

He had a smile on his brows and looked rather smug.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t help laughing at his suggestion.

“So you were thinking of dealing with him there, huh?” he asked. “However, he already knows I’m just a boredom reliever. Does talking really work?”

Huo Wujiu’s smile stagnated.

Tsk… after Jiang Suizhou left just now, he said some nonsense to Huo Yuyan. Did he hear all of it?

He immediately raised his eyes and looked around and found Wei Kai who was standing beside him. He took two steps back, as if feeling guilty.

Huo Wujiu immediately glared and looked daggers at Wei Kai.

Wei Kai was so shocked by his stare that he dodged. However, Jiang Suizhou, who was next to him, laughed softly and said, “What’s the point of glaring at him?”

Huo Wujiu hurriedly glanced back at him, and found Jiang Suizhou smiling with his eyebrows stretched out.

Huo Wujiu ground his teeth, raised his hand and waved away the servants in the room. He then turned around and pressed Jiang Suizhou to the bed: “Are you going to keep laughing? Are you happy to be a plaything?”

Jiang Suizhou said with a smile, “What’s wrong with it? General, you now like me and are willing to favor me. That’s my blessing.”

He put on the arrogant look that he had deliberately put on at the banquet merely as a jest. However, Huo Wujiu’s eyes instantly darkened.

Jiang Suizhou was startled. He promptly restrained his expression and attempted to get up.

But Huo Wujiu pressed him back, firmly restraining his wrist and confining him to his chest.

Jiang Suizhou couldn’t move at all. The next moment, Huo Wujiu leaned forward and pinned him firmly in place.

“Since you like being a plaything, you must know how to serve people first,” Huo Wujiu clenched his teeth and attacked him.

Jiang Suizhou didn’t show any weakness: “It was mere talk in front of others. Don’t forget, you are this Prince’s concubine.”

Huo Wujiu was rendered speechless.

Then, he bent down fiercely and kissed Jiang Suizhou’s ardently.

“What concubine? You said you’d promote me to be your main wife. Don’t go back on your word.”

——

The next morning, Huo Yuyan arrived at the imperial study.

He had already mapped out the people on Huo Wujiu's side along the way. The composition of these officials was very complex, unlike the Crown Prince's party in Ye City, the officials he specially promoted/fired and selected in several imperial examinations.

The people Huo Wujiu picked were a mixture of good and bad together.

There were the old officials in Yangguan, as well as guards of regions and counties he conquered when he went south. In addition, there were some little-known officials, whom even Huo Yuyan couldn't name.

He could say these people were easy to deal with. After all, they didn't have close ties with Huo Wujiu. As long as he treated them favorably according to their status, he didn't have to be worried about them defecting. However, it was precisely because of the complex composition of these people that there was no room for an oversight. He must be cautious in dealing with them.

Fortunately, Huo Wujiu didn't notice anything at present and directly handed over the power of appointing officials to him.

Huo Yuyan knew that a long delay might give rise to many a hitch, so even when he had a raging hangover and was still acclimatizing, even when he couldn't get up, he forced himself to rise. He got up early and arrived at the imperial study.

To his surprise, he wasn't the first one there.

Someone else had gotten there first.

As soon as he got to the door of the imperial study, he heard a voice inside, which sounded quite lively. He frowned imperceptibly. Although there was no expression on his face, his pace accelerated.

Huo Wu Jiu left the palace early this morning, he knew it. So who would be sitting in the imperial study now?

When he reached the door, a young eunuch was rushing outside and bumped into him head-on.

“Your Highness!” The young eunuch was stunned and hurriedly greeted. “Don’t worry, Your Highness. I’ll go and deliver your summons!”

Summon?

Except when entering his father’s imperial study, Huo Yuyan hadn’t been ‘summoned’ in years.

The young eunuch ran back all the way and raised his voice: “Prince, the Crown Prince is here!”

Prince?

This time, even Huo Yuyan’s bland expression couldn’t help but tauten.

The young eunuch next to him stepped forward and sharply said, “What Prince? Is this imperial study for anyone to enter?”

The ones he questioned were the eunuchs and soldiers guarding the entrance of the imperial study. Hearing his rebuke, the several people looked at each other, and only after a moment did they hear the one in the lead say, “Your Highness, don’t be angry. Before you came, the General had always allowed the Prince to enter and leave the imperial study…”

Huo Yuyan took a deep breath, gently smiled, and said, “It’s okay. It’s Wujiu’s family matter. I shouldn’t poke my nose into it.”

After saying that, he nodded at the soldier in charge with a faint smile and walked towards the imperial study.

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